

Peer Collaborative Dialogues: Perceptions and Attitudes of EFL Students and Teachers

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Abstract

Research has consistently demonstrated that student interactions and collaborative learning are essential components of the educational process. It is crucial to incorporate peer-to-peer interactions in second language learning environments. This study investigated the student and teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the emphasis on formal language aspects during peer interactions in their regular English classes. The data was collected through a student survey and an interview with the teacher. The study involved one English language teacher and 22 seventh-grade students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a public school in Oman. The results indicated that the students generally held positive attitudes towards collaborative dialogues (CDs). The participants were found to be capable of assisting one another and contributing to overall language improvement, particularly in the correct pronunciation of English words. The teacher also expressed a favourable stance on implementing CDs in her instruction, asserting that the dialogues promote cooperation and mutual learning among the students. Consequently, it is recommended that textbook writers incorporate activities that promote student interaction, which may facilitate productive CDs. Educators should judiciously integrate collaborative learning activities into their daily classroom practice.

Keywords: perceptions, attitudes, classroom interaction, peer-peer interaction

1. Introduction

According to Liu and Xu (2018), classroom interaction is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon encompassing various forms and functions. This interaction can occur between teachers and individual students, teachers and the entire class, and among students in dyads, triads, or small groups. Van Lier (2013) observed that the teacher-student interaction, typically initiated and managed by the teacher, can provide different opportunities for the negotiation of meaning compared to the student-student interaction. The initiation-response-feedback (IRF) model frequently exemplifies this type of interaction.

Interactions with peers and teachers is a critical component of language acquisition in the classroom setting. Ellis and Fotos (1999) posit that interaction contributes to language learning in two ways: by providing negative evidence and by offering opportunities for modified output. The social interactionist perspective asserts that language is a rule-governed cultural activity that learners can acquire through interactions with others. Masjedi and Tabatabaei (2018) suggest that students who actively participate in classroom discussions and verbalize their thoughts tend to experience enhanced language development compared to those who remain silent. Consequently, interaction plays a crucial role in facilitating language acquisition and development (Al-Buraiki, 2025; Gass & Mackey, 2014).

Student beliefs about and attitudes towards engaging in peer-peer interaction and collaborative learning presents an important area to uncover since they are the direct recipients of this type of learning. The teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning and peer interaction are crucial as well as teachers represent the implanters of the curriculum inside the classroom.

2. Literature Review

Various scholars have emphasized the significance of effective classroom strategies in facilitating the development of language learners. Kramsch (1986) posited that students can enhance their communicative competence through engagement in peer and teacher interactions, such as exchanging feedback, seeking clarification, and initiating dialogues. Additionally, researchers such as Rivers (1987) have advocated for the reduction of teacher-dominated discourse and the promotion of more student-centered engagement to foster productive classroom interaction. Consequently, Mackey (1999) and Al-Buraiki (2025) recommend that educators endeavor to create interactive learning environments that enable students to communicate with their peers and construct meaning in the target language.

Martin and Sippel (2022) examined the relationship between the students' attitudes towards peer feedback and pronunciation improvement following the incorporation of peer feedback in L2 pronunciation lessons. The research involved 74 first-year German students who were divided into three groups: peer feedback providers, peer feedback receivers, and a control group. The participants initially completed a questionnaire regarding their beliefs, followed by general pronunciation training for both the provider and receiver groups. Subsequently, the provider group offered feedback to their peers in the receiver group on their pronunciation. The statistical

analysis “revealed significant, positive relationships between learner beliefs about peer feedback and their learning gains” (p. 1). This finding suggests that possessing positive attitudes towards peer feedback is associated with enhanced pronunciation when said feedback is implemented in a classroom setting.

McDonough (2004) explored the perceptions of instructors and students regarding the use of group and pair work in a Thai EFL setting. The study involved 16 Thai EFL students at a major university in Northern Thailand who engaged in pair and small group activities as part of their regular English classes. The results revealed that “learners who had more participation during the pair and group activities demonstrated improved production of the target forms, even though they did not perceive the activities as useful for language learning” (p. 207).

Wijaya (2021) conducted a narrative qualitative study to investigate the perspectives of high school L2 instructors on collaborative learning activities with senior high school students in two Indonesian schools. The study employed interviews with two educators using five open-ended reflective questions concerning their implementation of collaborative activities in their classrooms and their perceptions of the role of these activities in senior high school contexts. The researcher identified two primary themes from the results: “(a) EFL teachers need to be more supportive learning partners for their learners and (b) the importance of incorporating holistic, humanistic, and social values in the face of the group’s diversity” (p. 124). The study revealed challenges in implementing collaborative learning activities, including uncooperative students during group-work monitoring and a general lack of awareness among EFL learners about collaborative learning skills. To address these issues, the researcher recommended establishing stringent classroom guidelines regarding the students’ participation in their groups during collaborative learning exercises.

Investigating the students’ perspectives and insights presents as a potential educational resource for enhancing their language acquisition. However, limited research has been conducted on the learners’ perspectives. Collins and White (2019) noted several constraints in their research, including the absence of student interviews “to obtain their perspectives on their decisions to focus on and comment on these features of language during their oral interaction with each other” (p. 27). Only three studies, McDonough (2004) and Wijaya (2021), have explored the teachers’ perceptions when using pair/group activities and collaborative learning. Given the crucial role of collaborative learning during peer interactions, particularly in drawing the students’ attention to the formal properties of the second language coupled with the value of students’ and teachers’ insights into educational issues, the present study aims to explore the students’ and teachers’ perceptions of and attitudes towards engaging in peer collaborative dialogues. Specifically, the study intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the students’ perceptions of peer interaction and collaborative dialogues as vehicles for focusing their attention on the formal properties of the L2?
2. What are the teachers’ perceptions of the students’ peer interactions and collaborative dialogues as vehicles for successfully drawing the students’ attention to the formal properties of the L2?

3. Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theory (SCT) is one of the most influential learning theories that has had a significant impact on language learning and teaching. This theory originated from the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) and is based on the notion that human activity is inherently socially situated. According to SCT, development and learning are interactive, and this interaction functions as mediation for language acquisition. Development, including L2 learning, is viewed as a social process that gradually advances into a psychological one. In other words, development is not characterised by changes in the product of learning but rather as a shift in the quantity and quality of the negotiated mediation. From the perspective of SCT, learning is initially an external activity that later progresses into an internal psychological one (Vygotsky, 1978).

Foster and Ohta (2005) argue that “knowledge is not owned solely by the learner but is also a property of social settings and the interface between person and social context” (p. 403). SCT emphasises that cognition and knowledge are inherently social and constructed through dialogue (Lantolf, 2013). Specifically, language learning is viewed as an individual appropriation that occurs through interactive exchanges with an interlocutor (Muhonen et al., 2017). As a result, knowledge is considered to be a social construct that is created through language use. The importance of oral interaction in language learning is emphasised as it functions as a scaffold when learners and peers collaborate to co-construct knowledge. Through such collaboration and deep processing, language learning is internalised. This perspective is supported by Cazden (2001) and Thorne and Hellermann (2015).

Vygotsky (1978) posits that development is essentially an internalisation process that initially occurs through social interaction. The individual’s development is shaped by social interaction and is mediated through semiotic artefacts, including language, numeracy, and mathematics, which are all part of one’s culture (Thorne & Hellermann, 2015). Although the idea of learning as a social practice is not new, it has gained more attention in pedagogical research since the 1990s, particularly through the application of Vygotsky’s learning theory by researchers (Mitchell et al., 2013).

Four key constructs relate to the SCT: mediation, zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding, internalization and collaborative interaction. SCT highlights the notion that the human mind is mediated, which is a fundamental concept. Vygotsky (1978) explains that mediation involves the use of tools by a child to solve problems or reach goals, with language being the most significant tool. Donato and McCormick (1994) explain that mediation is essential in generating higher mental processes such as “logical memory, selective attention, reasoning, analysis and the meta-cognitive dimension of problem-solving” (p. 456). Lantolf (2000a) argues that social activity mediates

the mind in higher mental activities, enabling individuals to consciously control their mental activities such as planning and problem-solving. Mediation in L2 learning includes mediation by others, mediation by self, and mediation by artefacts (Lantolf, 2000a; Tahmasebi & Yamini, 2011). Mediation by others refers to collaborative learning and peer interaction, mediation by self involves private speech, and mediation by artefacts includes language and other tools, such as the ones mentioned by Lantolf (2000a), specifically portfolios, tasks, and computer and video technology.

A central construct in SCT is the concept of the ZPD, which was originally developed by Vygotsky as early as the 1920s. Vygotsky (1978) defines the ZPD as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with [a] more capable peer” (p. 86). Shabani et al. (2010) explain that the ZPD, as understood by Vygotsky, describes “the current or actual level of development of the learner and the next level attainable through the use of mediating semiotic and environmental tools and capable adult or peer facilitation” (p. 238). Markee (2019) states that the ZPD represents “the developmental space between what may be currently achieved through solo performance and what can be prospectively achieved as a result of collaborative, scaffolded interaction between experts and novices” (p. 231). Vygotsky’s concept of the ZPD relies on a structure of participation or collaboration between an expert and a novice. This expert–novice collaboration can be taken into a variety of settings, that is, the interaction between a parent and a child, peer to peer, or a teacher and student. Mercer (1995) clarified that this co-construction of knowledge, which involves an expert, is crucial because “an activity which learners can do without any help is unlikely to be stretching their intellectual capabilities” (p. 72). We can understand from this that a task that goes beyond the learner’s current level but is still within his/her ZPD and is accomplished collaboratively with an expert, is expected to benefit the learner handling a task at hand.

An important part of SCT is the concept of scaffolding. Ohta (2001) defines scaffolding as “a collective process, through which assistance is provided from person to person such that an interlocutor is enabled to do something she or he might not have been able to do otherwise” (p. 52). Vygotsky explains that a child’s performance, which can also apply to learners, to complete a task alone differs from his/her performance when completing it with some assistance. More specifically, a child performs better with the assistance of others than what (s)/he could do without assistance (Al-Buraiki, 2023). Vygotsky labels this assistance as scaffolding, which should also occur within the child’s ZPD. From a constructivist perspective, a learner moving from a lower level to a higher one is made possible given the collaboration with an expert, that is, a more knowledgeable person. Those who act as assistants, be they the teacher or a fellow learner, are mediators between the student and the knowledge s/he is trying to understand. This enables the learner to reach the goals that are not likely to be accomplished by the learner on his/her own, provided that these processes occur within the ZPD of the learner (Al-Buraiki, 2023).

Based on the SCT perspectives, learning starts on a social level (interpersonal plane) and then moves to an individual level (intrapersonal plane), which is known as ‘internalisation’ or ‘appropriation’. Ellis (2008) explains that internalisation is the process by which a person moves from being regulated by others to self-regulation, which involves complete control over both the form and function of the L2. This means that once the processes and skills are internalised, they can be used in a self-regulated manner. Lantolf (2000b) adds that initially, an individual’s activity is “organized and regulated (e.g., mediated) by others, but eventually, in normal development, we come to organize and regulate our own mental and physical activity through the appropriation of the regulatory means employed by others” (p. 14).

Adopting SCT offers researchers a theoretical framework with which they can examine learning a language through a social lens that considers learners to be active participants in the meaning-construction and learning process, providing opportunities to explore the interaction between the various factors involved (Al-Buraiki, 2023). SCT, the theory of mind, views learners as active participants in a developmental process that is mediated via interaction (Vygotsky, 1986). Donato (2000) perceives learning as a social practice through which interlocutors offer and receive assistance, enabling them to reach beyond their individual capabilities.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Participants

The participants of the present research study consisted of 22 Grade 7 students and their teacher from a (Grade 5 – 12) school in Oman’s north Al-Batinah Governorate. The selection of participants was intentional. Maxwell (2012) emphasizes that qualitative research employs neither probability nor non-probability sampling to choose the settings and participants. Instead, it uses purposeful selection or purposive sampling. Maxwell elucidates that this approach involves deliberately selecting specific settings, individuals, or activities to obtain information directly relevant to the research questions and objectives (p. 97). He delineates five rationales for employing purposeful selection in qualitative studies, one being the selection of “groups or participants with whom you can establish the most productive relationships, ones that will best enable you to answer your research questions” (p. 99). Maxwell also accentuates considering “the feasibility of access and data collection ... research relationships with study participants, validity concerns, and ethics” (p. 99) when selecting study participants.

The study included one female Omani teacher in her late thirties with more than 15 years of teaching experience. The teacher, given the pseudonym Buthainah, possesses a bachelor’s degree in English literature and an educational diploma. She has a teaching experience that spans from Grades 3 to 9. She possesses extensive knowledge of the context and curriculum and has taught in Cycle 2 schools, which includes Grades 5 to 10, for over a decade. The teacher has prior experience teaching Grade 7 syllabi. She has taught the Grade 7 for over three years. Although not a native English speaker, she is an EFL teacher whose first language is Arabic.

4.2 Data Collection Tools and Procedures

The research employed two primary methods: a survey of the students and an interview with the teacher. The teacher was required to document peer interactions among the students during the selected tasks as part of the classroom observations for another research endeavour. A survey was administered to all 22 students in the class following the completion of Unit 3. The purpose was to investigate the students' perspectives and attitudes regarding engagement in peer collaborative tasks over time and across various activities, with the aim of directing their focus to the formal aspects of the second language (L2). The survey was comprised of 12 open-ended questions that was developed based on a literature review and then translated into Arabic to facilitate the clear and precise expression of ideas by the students. It was essential to ascertain the students' perspectives and perceptions regarding peer interactions and its impact on their L2 development during collaborative dialogues (CDs). The learners' viewpoints on their own interactions provided valuable supplementary information to the transcribed data from the recorded dialogues. The survey enabled the participants to articulate their interpretations of how CDs directed their attention to the L2's linguistic features and elucidate the challenges they encountered while completing collaborative tasks (Al-Buraiki, 2023).

Upon the completion of the unit of study, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the participating teacher. This interview sought to explore the teachers' perspectives and attitudes regarding the utilization of peer collaborative dialogues as a means of focusing the students' attention on the L2's formal properties. It provides deeper insights into the application of collaborative tasks in the Omani context, addressing areas such as perceptions, attitudes, possibilities, and challenges. Brinkmann and Kvale (2018) describe semi-structured interviews as distinct from both an open everyday conversation and a close-ended interview or questionnaire. Wallace (1998) suggests that semi-structured interviews "are more likely to yield more unexpected (and therefore, perhaps more interesting) data" (p. 135). The interview consisted of 11 open-ended questions designed to elicit rich data, and such interviews "are good for exploratory research where you have difficulty in anticipating the range of responses" (p. 135). Conducted in English, the interview was audio-recorded and transcribed by a research assistant researcher using the *Inqscribe* transcription software, verified by the researcher.

4.3 Data Analysis

The student survey was comprised of 12 open-ended inquiries, primarily examining the students' perspectives on peer interaction and the utilization of language-related episodes (LREs) for second language acquisition. Questions 1-6 explored the attitudes toward peer interaction and collaborative dialogues (CDs) in general, while questions 7-12 investigated perceptions of how CDs and peer interaction facilitate the learners' focus on the formal aspects of the target language. To mitigate language barriers and facilitate the expression of ideas, the survey was translated into Arabic. The teacher interview, consisting of 11 questions, targeted a Grade 7 English instructor. It encompassed two main areas: the teacher's experience with pair/group activities (Q1-Q2) and their views on utilizing peer CDs to highlight the linguistic features of the second language (Q3-Q11). The latter section also explored the teacher's observations on implementing CDs in Unit 3, along with the benefits, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

Two days after teaching Unit 3, the interview took place in a school meeting room on a regular day and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The researcher posed prepared questions, followed by additional inquiries for clarification, and employed supplementary questions to delve deeper into the teacher's responses. Naz et al. (2022) recommend using supplementary questions in semi-structured interviews, allowing the conversation to evolve naturally. King et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of interviewer flexibility, stating that it is "a key requirement of qualitative interviewing. The interviewer must be able to respond to issues that emerge in the course of the interview in order to explore the perspective of the participant on the topics under investigation" (p. 63).

A qualified research assistant employed *Inqscribe*, a software application that facilitates concurrent video/audio playback and script typing, to transcribe the interview data verbatim. Subsequently, the researcher verified the transcription's accuracy. The researcher meticulously examined the script multiple times, making "notes, comments, observations and queries" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 204). The annotation process was followed by coding and category development. The researcher systematically organized excerpts from the transcribed interviews into established categories and subcategories.

To ensure method triangulation and content validity, the interview transcription was cross-referenced with the student survey. This comparison involved analysing the students' perspectives on their own and others' contributions to collaborative tasks, their approach to language-related issues, and the knowledge acquired from language-related episodes. These were then juxtaposed with the teacher's responses regarding her perceptions of collaborative dialogue, along with the benefits, challenges, and recommendations for improvement. This analysis yielded five key themes, which will be examined subsequently.

5. Findings

5.1 Student Survey

The primary results revealed that most students appreciated collaborative work and expressed satisfaction with their group or pair activities. Numerous participants noted that these group tasks taught them cooperation and mutual assistance, particularly regarding the correct pronunciation of English words. A significant number of students demonstrated the ability to provide support to their classmates in various language areas as well as seek assistance from their peers. Over half of the students reported positive attitudes towards collaborative work. Furthermore, the students indicated that CDs enhanced their language skills, especially their pronunciation. Most students expressed a desire to continue using CDs in the future due to the language improvements they experienced. To enhance collaborative work, the students suggested modifying the group arrangements and striking a balance between individual, pair, and group activities. A comprehensive description of the survey questions and student responses follows. It should be noted that all student names

used were pseudonyms.

In conclusion, the survey responses indicate an overall positive perspective and attitude among the students towards collaborative work. The majority favoured working with peers because of the benefits of both collaboration and language acquisition. They expressed a willingness to engage in similar tasks in the future, with some suggestions for improving group organization and dynamics.

5.2 Teacher's Interview

The study's primary results indicate the teacher's favourable stance towards employing collaborative methods. The teacher advocated for the utilization of group tasks to foster cooperation and mutual learning. She viewed collaborative discussion as an effective approach to enhance the students' linguistic abilities and knowledge. However, when implementing interactive speaking exercises, the teacher expressed concerns about time management, dominant participants, and silent learners.

In summary, the teacher interview revealed her perspective on and attitudes toward student-peer interactions, including the potential to draw attention to the formal properties of the English language. Her responses to the semi-structured interview highlighted the advantages of incorporating peer interactions into her classes. Despite noting some challenges, the teacher expressed a willingness to implement collaborative work and utilize digital recording devices to identify student errors and improve their overall language skills. During the interviews, the teacher raised several issues, emphasizing the need for curriculum enhancement and educational reforms. The teachers' limited understanding of collaborative learning requires attention through relevant in-service training programs. These programs would aim to provide teachers with crucial knowledge and skills to facilitate effective collaborative learning. The teacher expressed her concerns about time allocation and its potential impact on syllabus coverage, which calls for thorough curriculum revisions and ongoing communication between curriculum departments and the classroom.

6. Emerging Themes

The analysis of the student survey responses and teacher interview elucidated five principal themes regarding classroom CDs. These themes provide insights into various aspects of CDs in educational settings. The first theme addressed the general perceptions of CDs as held by students and teachers. The second theme explored the language-related benefits of CDs. Theme three examines the social interactions among students during CDs. The fourth theme identified the challenges and issues encountered while implementing CDs. The final theme presents recommendations for improving CD practices in the classroom. Through an examination of these themes, a comprehensive understanding of student and teacher experiences with CDs can be obtained, facilitating potential enhancements in their efficacy. Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the emerging themes identified through the data analysis.

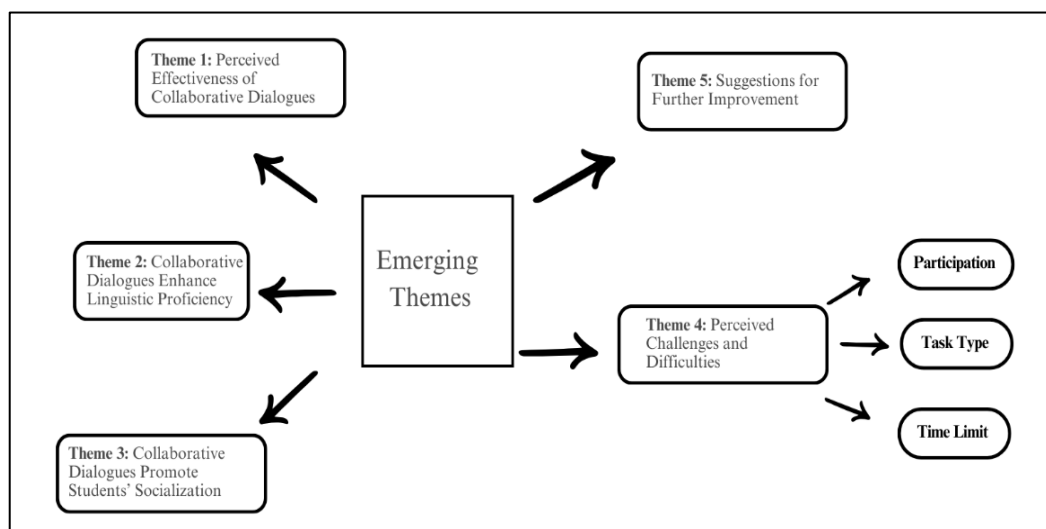


Figure 1. Emerging themes from the student surveys and teacher interview

5.1 Theme 1: Perceived Effectiveness of Collaborative Dialogues

The majority of students demonstrated a positive disposition towards collaborative work encompassing both group and pair activities. While some individuals expressed a preference for working in pairs, a larger proportion favoured group-based tasks. Students valued the opportunity to exchange knowledge and learn from their peers during collaborative exercises. For instance, Dina articulated her positive experience, stating, "I felt relaxed among my peers who corrected me and helped me in the activities." Other students employed affirmative descriptors such as 'comfortable,' 'happy,' 'like it,' 'nice feeling,' and 'motivated' to convey their favourable perspectives on utilizing CDs.

The teacher shared a comparable viewpoint on collaborative tasks, advocating for both group work and pair work in her classes. She recognized that each approach possessed distinct advantages and limitations, and her selection between group or pair work was contingent

on student proficiency and task type. In future planning, the teacher intended to incorporate additional collaborative activities into her lessons, reflecting the positive reception of this pedagogical approach. Buthaina also posited that her students engaged in collaborative tasks because of their desire for peer learning. She stated, “The students are interested in working together as a group.”

5.2 Theme 2: Collaborative Dialogues Enhance Linguistic Proficiency

The survey responses from the students and the interview with the teacher clarified the advantages of CDs in enhancing various language aspects for learners. The majority of the students, along with the teacher, observed that peer interaction facilitated improvements in pronunciation skills. In the student feedback, terminology related to pronunciation appeared more than 40 times, indicating its significance. For instance, when queried about partner contributions in collaborative tasks, Lama stated, “My peers assisted me in correctly pronouncing challenging words.”

The teacher posited that CDs effectively supported the students’ language development by enhancing their overall speaking abilities, including their discussion skills. When questioned about the observed benefits of implementing CDs, Buthaina mentioned “student cooperation,” “student discussion,” and “speaking.”

5.3 Theme 3: Collaborative Dialogues Promote Students’ Socialization

Students emphasized the social advantages of peer collaboration in their learning processes. Many have reported acquiring various skills from their peers, particularly in the domains of cooperation, collaboration, and mutual assistance. They observed that group activities facilitated the development of skills in sharing participation opportunities and offering support to one another. For instance, Kawther expressed satisfaction in acquiring collaborative skills through group and pair work, stating that “this made me happy since I contributed to assisting my peers.” The teacher also highlighted cooperation as a benefit of utilizing CDs, noting the “cooperation between the students” as an advantage of collaborative tasks.

The student survey and teacher interview revealed that collaborative learning fostered socialization skills, including the following:

- Peer support
- Encouraging equal participation
- Respecting others’ speaking turns
- Patience in turn-taking
- Developing self-assurance and overcoming shyness
- Enhancing social skills
- Overseeing group dynamics to ensure maximum participation
- Taking on leadership roles and managing turn-taking
- Offering encouragement and motivation to peers
- Embracing peer feedback
- Building friendships among students
- Engaging in conversations during pair work

5.4 Theme 4: Perceived Challenges and Difficulties

Both groups of participants, the students and the teacher, identified several impediments while engaging with CDs. Theme four addresses three challenges: participation, task type, and time limit.

5.4.1 Participation

The students and their teacher identified a significant issue regarding the extent of student engagement during collaborative learning activities. As May observed, “not everyone could participate in the dialogues.” The teacher expressed a similar concern, noting the “unequal participation of the students, where the outstanding students dominate the discussions and classroom participation.” This observation indicates that, while certain students were actively involved in completing tasks, others exhibited lower levels of engagement or participation. Such disparities in involvement could potentially compromise the effectiveness of collaborative learning sessions, as they may result in some students experiencing exclusion or disengagement from the educational process.

5.4.2 Task Type

Both teacher and students identified task type as a limiting factor in collaborative learning activities. The teacher observed that CDs were only effective for exercises focused on oral communication and grammatical structures but not for assignments involving reading or writing. Additionally, the teacher expressed her concern regarding the students’ limited vocabulary, which hindered their ability to articulate their thoughts and participate fully in discussions. Conversely, the students maintained a more positive perspective on vocabulary issues. Many studies have reported that CDs facilitate the acquisition of new words and enhance language proficiency. Nevertheless, both parties concurred that the task type was a crucial element to consider when implementing collaborative learning methods. They acknowledged that various tasks require different skills and approaches, and that collaborative learning might not be

suitable for every assignment type.

5.4.3 Time Limit

The teacher expressed concerns regarding the time consumed by collaborative activities. She observed that while students demonstrated proficiency in group work, they allocated considerable time to the deliberation and selection of appropriate responses to questions. Conversely, students did not share these temporal concerns, attributing their primary responsibilities to the teacher. Among the students, only Lama addressed the time allocation issue. When questioned about the efficacy of pair/group work, Lama stated, "The work was successful, and I did not waste my time. I was making use of my time by learning English and cooperating." She perceived the collaborative learning experience as an opportunity to enhance her English language skills and engage in cooperative work with her peers.

5.5 Theme 5: Suggestions for Further Improvement

Students expressed a preference for collaborative dialogues (CDs) over individual work and demonstrated an interest in participating in similar activities in future learning experiences. They provide recommendations to enhance collaborative learning, such as regularly altering group compositions, forming heterogeneous groups, reducing group sizes, and utilizing larger classrooms for group activities. One student, Joman, stated, "I prefer individual work. Group work can be acceptable if the number of students in the group is reduced." Additionally, the students emphasized the importance of balancing collaborative and individual learning based on the task type. Reema proposed, "Yes. I have a suggestion, to alternate between group work and individual work on a weekly basis." Another student suggested collaborating with peers on projects such as writing English stories, stating, "I believe the groups should have a smaller number of students. Perhaps, we can allocate one day a week for individual work and have a specific project to work on, such as writing a story in English."

The teacher also supported the utilization of both collaborative and individual activities depending on the task type, planning to continue employing collaborative learning for speaking, and grammar lessons. Buthaina, the teacher, expressed her intention to continue using peer CDs in future classes, stating, "Yes. I will continue using collaborative work, both pair and group work, to learn from one another, cooperate, provide more ideas, and give quick answers. I prefer collaborative learning in speaking and grammar tasks because speaking tasks improve students' overall language proficiency and grammar rules can be recalled more effectively in peer collaborative dialogues."

6. Discussion of the Findings

6.1 Students' Perceptions and Attitudes

The students generally exhibited a positive perception of collaborative peer dialogues. The majority expressed satisfaction when engaging collaboratively with their peers. For instance, Nada stated, "I like working in groups because my friend helps me improve myself." Similarly, Aseel remarked, "I like to work in a group because we benefit from each other, and we share answers with one another." This observation aligns with previous research such as the study by Sato (2013), who investigated Japanese EFL learners' perceptions of peer interaction. Sato discovered that learners held positive beliefs about this approach, appreciating peer work because of the reduced anxiety about making errors when speaking with classmates. Sato noted that learners perceived peer interaction as effective because it provided opportunities to converse with their peers and practice their language skills. Kos's (2020) research revealed the students' positive attitudes towards collaborative learning, attributed to their linguistic improvements. The study found that students valued pair work as it allowed them "to engage in discussions about language and to resolve linguistic problems" (p. 124). In Kim's (2016) study, learners preferred pair work over individual tasks due to the "availability of immediate feedback, pleasure in the process of pair work, the opportunity for communication and exposure to the target language" (p. 196). Storch (2004) reported comparable findings for participating students expressing preferences for peer interaction activities.

The students' positive perceptions can be better understood through an examination of their reported linguistic improvements. The majority of participants in this study indicated that CDs were most beneficial for their pronunciation, followed by vocabulary, and subsequently other language skills. In their survey responses, the term 'pronunciation' and related words were mentioned over 40 times as an area of improvement during collaboration. For instance, May noted, "My partner, Dina, used to correct my pronunciation when I make mistakes." Another participant, Kawther, stated, "I recall that I was unable to pronounce the words well, but with her help, I managed to pronounce the words and improve my pronunciation skills." Linh (2020) revealed that some students documented in their journals how their peers assisted them in pronunciation and intonation during paired collaborative activities.

A study conducted by Martin and Sippel (2022) examined the correlation between the students' attitudes and their improvement in second language pronunciation following participation in peer feedback activities. The results indicated that students with positive dispositions demonstrated enhanced pronunciation at both the word and sentence levels subsequent to peer interactions. This investigation highlights the perceived efficacy of collaborative learning in overall language acquisition, which is potentially attributable to the opportunities it provides for language-focused discourse. The disparities between this study's findings and those of previous related research may be ascribed to variations in the task types and requirements. For instance, Kim and McDonough's (2008) research determined that students regarded working on CDs as "most useful for facilitating listening comprehension" (p. 224), while only a small proportion of participants noted the benefits of peer interaction for vocabulary and grammar development.

The students reported benefits beyond linguistic improvements from collaborative work. They emphasized the significance of mutual support, peer learning, and social development. For example, Dina noted acquiring skills to assist classmates and collaborate in group

settings. Huda underscored the development of competencies, such as assisting others, teamwork, self-discipline, and respecting others' speaking turns. These non-linguistic advantages of peer collaborative dialogues enable students to provide assistance to their peers. Huda particularly valued interpersonal skills acquired, such as turn-taking. Similar outcomes were observed by Kos (2020), who found that some participants reported learning "how to collaborate better in order to support one another" (p. 124) through peer work. These findings suggest that peer collaborative dialogues enhance student relationships, fostering mutual trust and respect for each other's linguistic abilities and knowledge.

Several students identified the benefits of collaborating with more proficient peers. For instance, Lama observed that "my peers assisted me in correctly pronouncing complex words, answering questions, and determining word meanings." Kawther described her peer's assistance by stating, "She contributed to my learning because I occasionally struggled to comprehend the teacher's explanations. My peer provided support due to my limited proficiency." These observations are consistent with the findings of previous studies. Kim and McDonough's (2008) study, for example, highlighted the advantages of peer interaction and collaborative learning, stating that it "helped them to understand the text better and obtain answers to their questions about vocabulary and grammar" (p. 224). Similarly, the participants in the current study acknowledged their partners' contributions to their learning, particularly in improving their pronunciation. However, they did not comment on their partners' proficiency level. Future research on CDs could explore the students' perspectives on working with peers of varying skill levels.

Although most students had positive attitudes towards collaborative learning, two participants reported minimal contribution to CDs. One student, Raghad, stated that she primarily followed the leader's guidance, while Shooq mentioned that a lack of understanding prevented her from contributing. This behaviour may be attributed to the discomfort experienced by some learners when corrected by their peers. Five students reported feeling embarrassed, nervous, or dissatisfied during the interactions. For instance, Nada expressed embarrassment about making mistakes while reading, and Shooq felt inadequate because of her perceived lack of knowledge. Chu's (2013) findings showed mixed reactions among Taiwanese junior high school students towards peer feedback, with some appreciating it and others finding it unhelpful or embarrassing.

Kim and McDonough (2008) observed that proficiency levels influenced pair dynamics, with some learners adopting fewer active roles when they perceived their language skills to be inferior to their partners. Kim (2016) noted missed learning opportunities and limited outcomes during the peer interactions. This study found evidence of learning gains through peer CDs. For example, Reem reported improvements in the pronunciation and reading of complex words with assistance from her peer, Huda.

6.2 Teacher's Perceptions and Attitude

The teacher perceived collaborative learning through CDs and group/pair activities as an effective educational approach. Consequently, she intended to incorporate this methodology into her regular pedagogical practices, particularly in speaking and grammar instruction. Her favourable perspective of collaborative learning likely originated from classroom observations, in which she noted the students' engagement in such activities. She remarked, "The students find group work interesting". The linguistic progress resulting from the CDs could also explain her positive stance. The teacher characterized peer CDs as successful "because they were used to improve their language, discussion among students, and improve opinion sharing." Additionally, she posited that collaborative tasks imparted "cooperation" with students.

Nevertheless, the teacher expressed certain reservations regarding potential challenges. She identified the primary issue with peer CDs as the "unequal participation of the students, where outstanding students dominate the discussions and classroom participation. The outstanding students tended to give all the answers to the teacher, leaving no chances for other students." High-achieving students frequently controlled group discussions, thereby limiting participation opportunities for less-proficient learners. In Kim and McDonough's (2008) study, two intermediate-level students who exhibited passive behaviour when paired with more advanced partners reported negative attitudes towards pair work. The researchers noted that the advanced partners "tended to dominate the conversation, which prevented them from participating in the task" (p. 223). Wijaya (2021) investigated EFL teachers' perspectives on the implementation of collaborative learning in senior high school settings. The participants, EFL teachers with varied teaching experience, expressed concerns about disengaged and uncooperative students during group-work monitoring. De Hei et al. (2015) identified six challenges in implementing collaborative learning, including group conflicts, non-contributing members, insufficient student-teacher communication, students' reluctance to accept peer feedback, and educators' lack of coaching abilities. Their research also revealed that instructors consider designing collaborative activities to be complex. Le and Wubbels (2018) discovered that Asian EFL students often encounter difficulties with collaborative learning due to "free riding" and negative attitudes towards diverse group members.

Students with lower language proficiency often lack the necessary vocabulary and grammatical competence to effectively engage in collaborative discussions. The teacher noted that limited vocabulary is a significant barrier to collaborative learning. She posited that peer collaborative dialogues (CDs) were effective only for speaking and grammar tasks, not for reading and writing. This perspective may indicate incomplete knowledge or understanding of collaborative learning by teachers, potentially due to inadequate in-service training in implementing peer CDs across various language skills.

Research suggests that even less proficient learners can benefit from peer CDs even if they remain silent or passive. Dobao's (2016) study, which employed a pre/post-test design, found that all learners, including silent learners, gained from language-related episodes (LREs). The study concluded that "they were almost as likely to gain new knowledge as those learners who triggered the episodes" (p. 33).

Focusing on lexical LREs, Dobao's research demonstrated that limited vocabulary does not hinder group learning. Similarly, Ohta's (2001) study of adult learners showed that participants of all proficiency levels could actively contribute to collaborative tasks, with less proficient learners supporting their more advanced peers in dialogic activities.

McDonough's (2004) research revealed that students did not perceive peer interaction as beneficial for learning English, despite creating productive learning opportunities during pair and group activities. Learners tend to rely heavily on their teachers' expertise rather than their peers when learning a second language. Participants in McDonough's study believed that pair and small group activities were primarily useful for "practicing oral communication skills but less useful for learning English grammar" (p. 222). This partially aligns with the teacher's statement about CD activities, where she expressed a preference for "speaking and grammar tasks," adding that "the students learn the grammar rules and then apply them when they practice in their groups."

7. Conclusion and Implications

The research employed multiple methods, specifically a survey of students and an interview with a teacher, to collect the qualitative data for analysis. Examination of the survey responses and teacher interview revealed that the students utilized various scaffolding strategies, including posing questions, providing explanations, offering suggestions, and confirming information when engaged in the collaborative tasks. The students effectively supported one another in completing assignments and addressing language-related challenges. Consequently, the students' linguistic competencies and knowledge were enhanced, leading to collaborative knowledge construction and language skill development. Through mutual support and assistance, learners can overcome their linguistic difficulties. A potential area for further investigation in this context is examining how and to what extent teachers can motivate students to expand their focus on form to encompass greater attention to phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. One approach to achieving this is targeted instruction by the teachers. Specifically, the teacher can emphasize task-relevant language as part of focusing on particular forms that can facilitate the recognition of linguistic issues. Furthermore, the teacher may direct the students' attention to problematic language aspects related to grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

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Authors' contributions

I, Dr. Sheikha Al-Buraiki, was solely responsible for data collection, research methodologies, surveys and interviews.

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