

Exploring Teachers' Perceptions of EFL Students' Engagement in Collaborative Learning: Implementation Issues and Suggestions

Ali Abbas Falah Alzubi ¹, Mohd Nazim ² and Jalal Ahmad ³

¹ Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, Najran University, Najran, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;

² Department of English, College of Languages and Translation, Najran University, Najran, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;

³ English Skills Department, Preparatory Year, Najran University, Najran, Saudi Arabia.

Corresponding author: nazimspeaking@yahoo.co.in.

ABSTRACT: The evolving landscape of collaborative learning in English education for the last two decades has witnessed a notable research surge in diverse contexts. Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests a noticeable dearth of attention or very limited emphasis, particularly within the setting of Arabic-native speaking countries on exploring English teachers' perceptions concerning students' engagement in collaborative learning. Therefore, this study aims to identify teachers' perceptions of EFL students' engagement in collaborative learning with a special reference to implementation issues and solutions to address the challenges. The descriptive survey design was employed to attain the study objectives. A sample of (45) EFL teachers chosen following the convenient sampling method answered a closed-item questionnaire and did an interview. The results revealed that EFL teachers highly perceived implementing collaborative learning among university students in EFL classrooms. Also, the respondents' teaching experiences did not impact their perceptions of implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms. In addition, gender did not play any role in affecting the respondents' answers to implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms. Finally, the analysis of interview contents showed that the problems that teachers face in implementing collaborative learning include diverse language proficiency, cultural differences, impartial participation, personal conflicts, limited class time, access to resources, and lack of professional development. Additionally, the participants suggested differentiated teaching, encouraged participation, efficient time management, language skill grouping, and EFL-specific teacher training to make a collaborative learning environment effective.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, EFL Teachers' Perceptions, Student Engagement, Implementation Issues and Suggestions.

I. INTRODUCTION

The advancing environment of pedagogy stimulated the emergence of new methods and approaches, prompting teachers to embrace an innovative teaching technique, i.e., collaborative learning. Collaborative learning has been regarded as an innovative strategy to mount student engagement [1- 3]. Collaborative learning, a social construct, enables teachers to diversify their teaching methods in varied group activities and tasks to meet students' needs and enrich their potential talents, such as teamwork, peer learning, and social intelligence. According to Johnson et al. [4], collaborative learning positions students in small groups and allows them to do tasks together to improve their and each other's learning. In addition, Johnson and Johnson [5] define collaborative learning as an organized group learning process where students actively exchange information, collaborating within a structure that emphasizes individual responsibility and a shared goal of enhancing collective learning. Moreover, collaborative learning has advanced over the past two decades and has seen a considerable increase in various settings, including English teaching settings.

Rance-Roney [6] contends that collaborative learning functions as an instructional approach fostering cooperation and teamwork among students, enabling them to collectively build knowledge and collaborate on various tasks. Scholars, in the language classroom context, characterize cooperative learning as a set of potent pedagogical methods and learning strategies aimed at cultivating students' involvement, critical thinking, social interaction, communicative skills, and various other competencies essential in the ever-evolving 21st century [7-15]. Teachers employ collaborative learning strategies to encourage and help students each other in order to complete their assignments. Slavin [16] emphasized the fundamentals of collaborative learning, which inspires students to work together on assignments and help one another. Researchers believe that collaborative learning implementation enhances student performance levels in classrooms. According to Boardman et al. [1], teachers witness improvement in student performance when collaborative learning is implemented in the classroom. Furthermore, many scholars trust a wide range of collaborative learning methods used in educational institutions around the world [2, 3, 17]. Nonetheless, it is not as easy to implement collaborative learning as one may consider. Students may experience unnecessary worry and dissatisfaction if group activities are not planned and carried out appropriately. This involves teachers' knowledge about how groups are formed, including their size and structure, students' different personalities, and learning preferences [18, 19, 20]. Hence, it is essential to employ effective strategies in order to make group activities more inclusive. According to Adkins-Coleman [21], Calderon et al. [2], Diego [22], and Slavin [17], various collaborative learning strategies are beneficial in increasing engagement. Scholars are of the view that collaborative learning activities require the right planning and careful grouping of students. Kunsch et al. [23], Eskay et al. [24], Horton [25], and Bradford et al. [26] maintain that collaborative learning strategies require proper planning and selective grouping of students. Teachers should include mixed levels of students in groups and, in order to promote socialization, groups should be switched every two to three weeks. High-achieving students can benefit from lower-level support, while lower-level students can benefit from peer tutoring. Nevertheless, researchers have listed a number of problems in implementing collaborative learning. For example, Baker and Clark [27] observe that learners do not often cooperate well with their peers because they have different proficiency levels and competencies. Similarly, Gillies and Boyle [28] admit that language teachers often have trouble implementing collaborative learning activities in the name of organization and time management. Likewise, Leeuwen et al. [29] observed that language teachers confront significant issues, especially in learners' active participation and monitoring them during collaborative learning activities. Moreover, studies also present some effective measures to address the implementation issues. For instance, Woolley et al. [30] advocate having mixed-ability student groups where efficient learners and slow learners interact to build the gap in their distinctive skills, knowledge, and proficiency. Likewise, Kozhevnikov et al. [31] agree that mixed-ability groups provide learning opportunities not only to less efficient learners but also to more proficient learners, as the collaborative tasks and activities require more in-depth and cognitive effort for successful completion.

Henceforth, keeping the progressing landscape of collaborative learning in English education in mind, the present study seeks to (1) explore teachers' perceptions of EFL students engagement in collaborative learning; (2) find any differences in the respondents' answers attributed to gender and years of teaching experience; (3) identify the problems the teachers face in implementing collaborative learning; and (4) discover the suggestions to address the implementation issues to make collaborative learning effective.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study's theoretical framework is in line with the components of cognitive, developmental, social constructivism, cooperation, and competition theories [32-37]. These theories consider language as a cognitive tool and highlight the crucial role of collaborative group efforts in advancing student learning. These viewpoints propose that learners construct their knowledge networks through collaboration, linking new information to their existing understanding. Moreover, these approaches emphasize the value of group activities for peer interaction, fostering learner development and social interactions. Central to these theories is the concept of involving all members in the group to achieve common goals, including promoting both individuals' learning and cognitive development. In detail, Johnson et al. [4] see collaborative learning as a strategy where the students work together in small groups on a given task. Similarly, Kagan [38] describes collaborative learning as a collective performance where learners exchange

information to learn. Furthermore, Chen and Goswami [39] underscore the importance of comprehending the impact of collaborative learning strategies on English learners. According to Suto [40], one of the most important abilities in the twenty-first century is teamwork since, in contrast to most works from the previous century that relied heavily on individual ability, projects in the classroom nowadays require group effort. Besides, Johnson and Johnson [41] assert that EFL students, through collaborative learning strategies, can acquire a number of benefits that, in turn, will be beneficial for their future endeavors.

1. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Numerous studies have been conducted on collaborative learning and its impact on EFL students in diverse contexts and settings. For example, Alias et al. [42] discovered teachers' perceptions and employed collaborative learning in the teaching and learning processes. The results demonstrated that teachers had a favorable viewpoint on collaborative learning. Instructors agreed that collaborative learning can create a welcoming environment in the classroom. However, the study emphasized that teachers were strongly committed to implementing collaborative learning. In addition, Rahmawati [43] found that English teachers responded well to collaborative learning. Teachers noted that this method makes young learners more delighted than working on their projects alone. Similarly, Thanh [44] analyzed college instructors' and students' perceptions regarding collaborative learning tasks. The data was gathered through interviews and a questionnaire. Group learning emerged as a popular and favored teaching strategy; however, there was frequent misunderstanding of collaborative learning functions. Various institutional and cultural constraints, including task distribution, class size, and curriculum coverage, further hampered collaborative learning. In addition, Celik et al. [45] investigated the perceptions and beliefs of teachers regarding the applicability of collaborative learning in the Turkish context. The researcher used two focus group interviews and a questionnaire to triangulate the results. The study concluded that the teachers understood the idea of group learning well and acknowledged the value of collaborative instruction in foreign language classes. The findings also demonstrated that learning from peers rather than the course teacher may cause students to feel less anxious and more prepared. However, the two biggest obstacles to introducing collaborative learning were the standardized EFL curriculum and students' attitudes. Moreover, Hinson [46] conducted a mixed-method study to explore the perceptions of teachers and students regarding learning and engagement through Kagan collaborative learning structures. An expert trained 19 instructors and 107 students for the survey, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight teachers. The study found that students were more motivated and engaged when completing assignments in groups. It also highlighted the challenges teachers face when implementing Kagan cooperative learning structures, such as time constraints and lack of experience with collaborative learning. Similarly, George [9] conducted a study to examine the impact of teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning strategies on student engagement and academic performance. Data was gathered from English teachers through pre- and post-questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews. The results indicated a positive effect of teachers' perceptions of cooperative learning techniques on English language learners' academic performance and engagement. Teachers also expressed belief in the benefits of these strategies in the classroom. Additionally, the study demonstrated how the use of the Jigsaw collaborative learning method increased learner motivation. Fitrianti [47] investigated teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning implementation in EFL classrooms. The research utilized a questionnaire and interviews to collect data, revealing that teachers had a positive view of collaborative learning. Collaboration in learning was found to meet students' needs in achieving their learning objectives. The classroom context, students' backgrounds must be considered when selecting the best collaborative learning program. In addition, students appeared to be enjoying their shared learning experience. They were leading class activities more actively. Furthermore, students' achievements indicated that the collaborative technique impacted their motivation, confidence, and enthusiasm in learning English.

Furthermore, studies have also been conducted on collaborative learning components and their impact on EFL students in diverse contexts. For instance, Yamada [48] examined a project-based learning approach guided by value-centered team learning. Nineteen teachers and 73 Japanese high school students completed a year-long project-based learning program. Teachers' and students' responses to questionnaires, both quantitative and qualitative, were gathered by the researcher. The findings demonstrated that value-centered team learning might be successful in fostering an environment where everyone may learn a great deal from one another through lively interaction. As a result, this study recommends that English teachers use value-centered team learning to engage actively in project-based learning. In addition, Ishtiaq and Hussain [49] examined English teachers' perceptions and practices regarding collaborative learning. A survey of 17 items was used to report the opinions of 80 EFL teachers. The survey addressed every potential obstacle to incorporating collaborative learning strategies into EFL classrooms. The findings showed that although there were real-world obstacles to collaborative learning techniques, the benefits were significantly greater. The study suggested that to improve EFL learners' competency level, administrators and policymakers should give careful thought and support to make collaborative learning effective. The study also dispels the myth that most professionals teaching English as a second language are unprepared to practice and apply CL methods in their classrooms. Additionally, Nguyen et al. [50] examined teachers' experiences regarding collaborative learning implementation in English language classes. The study was carried out in a Vietnamese city with forty-six teachers. Before participating in the research, each participant had implemented collaborative learning in the classroom for at least two years. Interviews and questionnaires were employed in the study. Most teachers had favorable opinions about implementing collaborative learning. In terms of challenges the teachers encountered, results indicated that the large class size, the loudness, and the loss of class control were frequently cited as impediments. They also provided strategies for encouraging collaborative learning, such as explicitly defining students' roles, preparing the environment for learning, and keeping a careful eye on the groups. Besides, Beiki et al. [51] examined the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward collaborative learning and their methods for implementing it in the setting of higher education. Thirty English instructors were chosen using a mixed-method approach that included stratified random sampling to achieve the study objectives. The instructors were invited to complete a collaborative learning assessment questionnaire to obtain general understanding of their perspectives on collaborative learning. In addition, a sample of six writing classes was observed to check collaborative learning in writing instructions. Finally, thirty teachers participated in semi-structured interviews to better understand the challenges in implementing collaborative learning, particularly in writing classes. The majority of teachers thought that collaborative learning was an effective technique for teaching languages. Furthermore, their preferred collaborative learning principle was promotive interaction. The findings showed that teachers favored implementing cooperative learning activities in their writing instructions. In the same vein, Zheng et al. [52] explored how EFL teachers felt about collaborative writing used in Chinese tertiary institutions. According to the analysis, there were discrepancies in the 31 EFL teachers' beliefs and implementation and their knowledge and perceptions. Although the instructors thought collaborative writing was practical and beneficial, over half did not implement it. The study offered suggestions for implementing collaborative writing in educational contexts. Further, Ghaith [53] presented the findings of a mixed-methods study on the challenges of implementing different collaborative learning methods among experienced EFL teachers. The findings showed that learning together and creative argument were conceptually more important. Participants viewed the Jigsaw and cooperative learning structural approach as more consistent with their practices. The study also demonstrated that, despite implementation obstacles regarding teacher expertise, appropriate implementation, curriculum alignment and congestion, time on task, and institution policy, all collaborative learning techniques and strategies are valued.

The previous studies scrutinized collaborative learning and its effects on EFL students in diverse contexts. The available literature findings emphasize teachers' favorable opinions of collaborative learning, the advantages of this approach for improving student engagement and academic achievement and overcoming the difficulties teachers have when employing collaborative learning into practice, such as time limits, insufficient experience, and institutional limitations. For the current investigation, the literature review served as a solid basis by emphasizing the value of collaborative learning in EFL classrooms and its beneficial effects on student engagement and academic achievement. Despite the availability of research regarding collaborative learning in diverse contexts, the gap in the literature indicates that further research is needed to explore teachers' perceptions of EFL students' engagement in collaborative learning in Arabic-native speaking countries with a special reference to implementation issues and potential solutions. Therefore, the current study, in inspiration to achieve the study objectives, intends to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive EFL students' engagement in collaborative learning?
2. Do the participants' responses differ based on their gender and years of teaching experience?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing collaborative learning?
4. What recommendations can be provided to address implementation challenges and improve the effectiveness of collaborative learning?

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study's research questions hold significant importance in advancing our understanding of collaborative learning in EFL contexts. The first question delves into how teachers perceive student engagement in collaborative learning, offering insights into effective teaching practices. The second question explores potential differences in perceptions based on gender and teaching experience, enriching our knowledge of demographic influences on teaching approaches. The third question investigates the challenges teachers face in implementing collaborative learning, aiding in the development of tailored strategies for improvement. Lastly, the fourth question seeks suggestions to enhance implementation and effectiveness, bridging theory and practice for more impactful classroom experiences. Together, these questions contribute to the literature by providing practical insights and recommendations for enhancing collaborative learning in EFL settings.

III. MATERIAL AND METHOD

1. POPULATION AND SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The research was conducted among EFL faculty members at Najran University's Preparatory Year, a government university in the southern region of Saudi Arabia. The participants included 55 individuals, comprising 30 males and 25 females enrolled in the third semester of the 2023 academic year. They represented a variety of nationalities, including Jordan, India, Egypt, Sudan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and the USA. These faculty members held different degrees in English, including MA and PhDs in various areas of English and applied linguistics. They also had diverse teaching experiences, ranging from 1-5 years, 6-10 years, to over 10 years. The sampling method used was convenience sampling. The study questionnaire was administered through Google Forms, with the link shared among the study population. The study sample consisted of all the study community members by sending them the questionnaire link. Forty-five faculty members (24 males and 21 females) from the community responded to the questionnaire, with a rate of (81.8%). Table 1 shows the distribution of the study sample.

Table 1. Study sample according to background variables.

Variable	Category	No.	%
Teaching experience	1 - 5 years	10	22.2
	6 - 10 years	15	33.3
	+ 10 years	20	44.4
Gender	Male	24	53.3
	Female	21	46.7
Total		45	100

2. ETHICAL APPROVAL AND INFORMED CONSENT

Participants in the study were asked to participate voluntarily. The research received approval from the university's Ethics Committee under reference number (010493-023026-DS). Teachers who agreed to take part completed two copies of written informed consent, keeping one copy and returning the other to the researchers. Participants were informed that they could withdraw or decline to answer any questions at any time, even after agreeing to participate. They were also informed that they would not receive any direct or indirect benefits from participating in the study. Confidentiality of all provided data was assured, with the data being used solely for research purposes. Participants were encouraged to contact any researcher for further clarification or information.

3. TOOLS OF THE STUDY

The study identified teachers' perceptions of EFL students' engagement in collaborative learning. Therefore, the descriptive-survey design was employed. Data collection for this study employed two primary methods: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire, initially comprising 15 items, was developed based on prior research [44, 45, 9, 47, 48, 50, 51] to evaluate teachers' perceptions of EFL students' engagement in collaborative learning. The questionnaire items capture teachers' perceptions of EFL students' engagement in collaborative learning. It included items such as students prefer group work and that it leads to better decision-making and improved learning efficiency, and students enjoy cooperating with their peers, actively listen to them, and take pleasure in their peers' successes. Additionally, students consider their teammates' interests, respect their differing perspectives, and find satisfaction in interacting and working together. Students may hesitate to ask questions to their classmates. Following validation, the questionnaire was refined to include 12 final items. This tool provided a structured approach to gather quantitative data on teachers' perceptions. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 teachers to delve deeper into implementation challenges and gather suggestions for improving the effectiveness of collaborative learning. The interview questions were crafted based on the researchers' expertise and insights from relevant literature [51, 47, 48, 50]. The interview prompts were problems in implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms and suggestions for effective implementation of collaborative learning in EFL classrooms. These interviews, lasting approximately 5-10 minutes per participant and conducted in a faculty office, offered a qualitative perspective on teachers' experiences and insights. By utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, this study aimed to comprehensively explore teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning in EFL classrooms, shedding light on both the challenges and potential solutions in implementing this approach effectively.

4. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The study tools underwent validation by a jury of eight experts in English language teaching, each with extensive teaching experience. The jury evaluated the instruments to ensure they could effectively collect information relevant to the research questions. Additionally, the experts identified some wordiness and linguistic concerns, providing recommendations for changes to the language, wordiness, style, and context.

1. The jury recommended employing specific terminology and expressions in peer learning and social intelligence as collaborative learning components.

2. The jury advised to include 12 items instead of 15 (excluding some repetitive items).

From:

- i. Students like working in a group.
- ii. I believe that a group makes better decisions.
- iii. I find that a group enhances students learning efficiency.
- iv. Students enjoy co-operating with each other.
- v. Students show a great collaboration in groups.
- vi. Students listen to their classmates.
- vii. Students are happy completing the tasks.
- viii. Students consider their groups interests.
- ix. Students respect different perspectives while working in groups.
- x. Students encourage their mates in completing tasks successfully,
- xi. Students enjoy interacting with each other.
- xii. Students greet each other when participating in the tasks.
- xiii. Students enjoy roles given to groups.
- xiv. Students never ask questions in groups.
- xv. Students interact, greet, and enjoy group roles.

To:

- i. Students prefer working in a group rather than working alone.
- ii. I believe that a group makes better decisions than individuals do.
- iii. I find that teamwork enhances students learning efficiency.
- iv. Students enjoy co-operating with their peers
- v. Students listen to their classmates with attention.
- vi. Students are pleased seeing their peers complete the tasks successfully.
- vii. Students take into account their teammates interests.
- viii. Students respect different perspectives of their teammates.
- ix. Students enjoy interacting with their teammates.
- x. Students enjoy participating in the tasks with their peers.
- xi. Students enjoy role identification assigned to them.
- xii. Students hesitate asking questions to their classmates.

3. The jury recommended modifying the interview questions into two different prompts: Teachers' problems in implementing collaborative learning and suggestions to address the implementation issues to make collaborative learning effective.

In addition, the study tool, questionnaire, was piloted to an exploratory sample of (20) teachers to check its internal consistency. Then, Pearson correlation coefficients were extracted, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Questionnaire's internal consistency.

Items	Correlation coefficient	Sig.	Items	Correlation coefficient	Sig.
1	.928**	.000	7	.899**	.000
2	.802**	.000	8	.828**	.000
3	.891**	.000	9	.864**	.000
4	.867**	.000	10	.896**	.000
5	.882**	.000	11	.882**	.000
6	.872**	.000	12	.817**	.000

(*) Significant at (0.05), (**) Significant at (0.01)

Table 2 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients between EFL teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning in Saudi Arabian EFL classes and the total score, which were statistically significant at the 0.01 significance level. The correlation coefficients between the items and the total score ranged from 0.817** to 0.928**, all of which were statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Additionally, the questionnaire's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha and split-half methods. Table 3 indicates that Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.92, while the split-half coefficient was 0.89. These high values indicate strong reliability, making them suitable for the study.

Table 3. Questionnaire’s reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha & split-half).

No.	Questionnaire	Cronbach’s Alpha	Split-half (Guttman)
	Total	0.92	0.89

5. DATA ANALYSIS

SPSS version 23 was utilized for data analysis in this study. The analyses included Pearson correlation coefficient to assess validity, Cronbach’s alpha and split-half methods for reliability, and means, standard deviations, and ranking to address the first research question on teachers’ perceptions of EFL students’ engagement in collaborative learning. Additionally, a grading system was implemented to determine the degree of approval for each item and the overall study tool, based on a specified range equation.

Table 4. Interpreting mean values according to the range equation.

Degree	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high
Mean	1 - 1.80	> 1.81 - 2.60	> 2.61 - 3.40	> 3.41 - 4.20	> 4.21 - 5.00

Kruskal’s test was used to show the significance of the differences according to the teaching experiences and t-test for the gender variable to answer the second question. Finally, the interviewees’ answers were analyzed following Braun and Clarke’s [54] scheme. The data was read and refined. Then, it was classified under main topics and themes. Finally, the results were reported.

IV. RESULTS

1. TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF EFL STUDENTS’ ENGAGEMENT IN COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Table 5 shows the results of the study sample’s responses toward EFL students’ engagement in collaborative learning. From Table 5, the total degree of EFL teachers’ perceptions of implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms came to a high degree (M=3.91, SD=0.395). The means for the items ranged between medium and very high degrees. The respondents very highly perceived that teamwork enhances students’ learning efficiency, and a group makes better decisions than individuals do. The least perceived item was that students hesitate to ask questions to their classmates.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for teachers’ perceptions of EFL students’ engagement in collaborative learning.

No.	Items	Mean	Standard deviation	Rank	Degree
1	Students prefer working in a group rather than working alone.	3.70	.968	11	High
2	I believe that a group makes better decisions than individuals do.	4.27	.654	2	Very high
3	I find that teamwork enhances students learning efficiency.	4.33	.707	1	Very high
4	Students enjoy co-operating with their peers	3.71	.895	10	High
5	Students listen to their classmates with attention.	3.93	.720	7	High
6	Students are pleased seeing their peers complete the tasks successfully.	4.11	.745	3	High
7	Students take into account their teammates interests.	4.02	.690	4	High
8	Students respect different perspectives of their teammates.	3.80	.588	9	High
9	Students enjoy interacting with their teammates.	4.00	.798	5	High
10	Students enjoy participating in the tasks with their peers.	3.96	.878	6	High
11	Students enjoy role identification assigned to them.	3.82	.834	8	High
12	Students hesitate asking questions to their classmates.	3.20	1.100	12	Medium
	Total degree	3.91	.395		High

2. THE IMPACT OF STUDY SAMPLE'S RESPONSES DUE TO THEIR TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND GENDER

Table 6 displays the findings regarding the influence of respondents' teaching experience on their attitudes toward implementing collaborative learning in the EFL classroom. The table indicates that there were no statistically significant differences at the 0.05 significance level in EFL teachers' perceptions of implementing collaborative learning based on their teaching experience. The P value for the significance level was greater than 0.05.

Table 6. Kruskal-Wallis test (teaching experience and study sample responses).

	Experience	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Total degree	1 - 5 years	10	27.55	1.568	2	.457
	6 - 10 years	15	21.87			
	+ 10 years	20	21.58			
	Total	45				

In addition, Table 7 presents the influence of respondents' gender on their attitudes toward implementing collaborative learning in the EFL classroom. The table indicates that there were no statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level in EFL teachers' perceptions of implementing collaborative learning based on gender. The P value for the significance level was greater than 0.05.

Table 7. T-test results for the impact of the respondents' gender on their answers to implementing collaborative learning in the EFL classroom.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total degree	Male	24	3.85	.450	-.997-	43	.325
	Female	21	3.97	.319			
	Total	45					

3. PROBLEMS IN IMPLEMENTING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN EFL CLASSROOMS

Teachers' interview contents regarding the problems that teachers face in implementing collaborative learning were qualitatively analyzed. The content analysis listed the problems that teachers face in implementing collaborative learning including but not limited to, (1) managing diverse language proficiency levels among teammates, (2) addressing cultural differences impacting communication and inclusivity, (3) ensuring impartial participation of all group members, (4) handling group dynamics and conflicts, (5) managing limited class time, (6) evaluating individual contributions fairly, accessing adequate resources, and (7) lacking sufficient professional development or support for effective facilitation of collaborative learning strategies. Some of the participants' excerpts are listed below:

T1: "Students' distinct levels of English proficiency are a main challenge we encounter when implementing collaborative learning coz, it makes it difficult collaborating and communicating effectively in groups"

T6: "The primary problem I encounter when implementing collaborative learning in English classrooms is the language ability level of their students."

T7: "It is common knowledge that students have varying cultural origins and that they have different traditions, communication styles, and expectations when working in groups on projects. Creating inclusive teams and groups and bridging these gaps is one of the biggest problems teachers face."

T10: "The most significant problem is making sure that each team member has an equal opportunity to participate. In collaborative learning, we observe situations when some students take the lead in conversations or activities while others stay quiet or uninterested."

T13: "controlling group dynamics, settling conflicts, and creating a good environment. These problems could be caused by arguments, interpersonal conflicts, or different work styles among learners."

T14. "It can be difficult and complicated to plan and carry out cooperative learning activities in the short amount of class time. Teachers typically struggle with time management in the classroom, particularly as they transition from one-on-one instruction to group and collaborative learning."

T16: "Finding the necessary and suitable materials for collaborative education might be regarded as one of the primary problems. Some EFL classrooms may have limited resources, which affects the effectiveness and variety of collaborative learning activities."

T19: "It is widely known that not all teachers have received the necessary training or experience to properly facilitate collaborative learning. Consequently, a common problem that teachers run into when introducing collaborative learning in an EFL classroom is a lack of professional development or resources to assist them in the process."

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN EFL CLASSROOMS

Also, the interview contents regarding the suggestions to address the implementation issues to make collaborative learning effective were qualitatively analyzed. The qualitative analysis listed a number of suggestions: (1) differentiated instruction, (2) encouraged participation, (3) effective time management and communication, (4) strategic grouping with varying language proficiency levels, (5) a welcoming and culturally diverse environment, (6) specific roles with periodic rotation, (7) teacher's role as a facilitator, and (8) teacher training on how to adopt strategies specific to EFL situations. Some of the participants' excerpts are listed below:

T2: "to solve implementation problems and to improve collaborative learning could be through differentiated instruction. Teachers must differentiate their instruction or offer extra support."

T3: "Encouraging and motivating group members to participate in tasks and activities can be a fantastic idea to solve the implementation issue and thus improve the effectiveness of collaborative learning. To guarantee that every student participates and makes a significant contribution, teachers must use creative and efficient teaching methods."

T5: "through good time management. Together with introducing collaborative instruction in the classroom, teachers should efficiently manage and allot class time for group work."

T6: "to communicate the aims and expected outcomes of collaborative activities effectively."

T7: "developing strategic groups that give special regard to individuals with varying degrees of language proficiency. A supportive environment where students may support one another can be fostered by mixing up the proficiency levels to promote peer tutoring and collaborative learning."

T8: "Creating assignments that are manageable for the specified language proficiency levels while maintaining clarity and organization is one of the many suggestions, I can offer to make collaborative learning effective."

T9: "schedule time for language practice and communication skill development within collaborative assignments."

T10: "Creating a welcoming, culturally diverse environment where students feel free to express themselves is one of the suggestions. This can enable group members to talk about and recognize cultural differences, which eventually fosters respect and understanding among peers."

T12: "assign specific roles or responsibilities and rotate them periodically to give students different opportunities and challenges within groups to ensure equitable participation and accountability."

T14: "To tackle the challenges associated with implementing collaborative learning, a particular suggestion is to take on the role of a facilitator. This involves keeping an eye on group interactions, offering assistance when needed, and stepping in to resolve disagreements or misunderstandings."

T20: “to provide teachers with training and help in adopting strategies for collaborative learning that are specific to EFL situations. Teachers who undertake professional development can improve their capacity to lead cooperative learning activities compared to those who do not.”

V. DISCUSSION

The study found that EFL teachers' overall perception of implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms was highly positive. This indicates that teachers view collaborative learning among university students in EFL classrooms very favorably. They particularly believe that teamwork enhances student learning efficiency and that groups can make better decisions than individuals. However, the least perceived aspect was that students hesitate to ask questions to their classmates. These results can be attributed to the widely accepted benefits of collaborative learning methods, such as enhancing learning efficiency, promoting collective decision-making, fostering experiential learning, encouraging critical thinking, preparing students for professional environments, and increasing student engagement. Teachers' high perception may also stem from the belief that collaborative learning improves comprehension and retention of information, encourages critical thinking, and prepares students for future careers. The findings of this study align with existing research that emphasizes teachers' strong positive perceptions of collaborative learning. For example, Alias et al. [42] and Rahmawati [43] found that teachers had positive perceptions toward collaborative learning. Instructors have also noted that students are happier when working collaboratively than when working on their projects individually. Similarly, Hinson [46] reported that collaborative assignments increased students' motivation and engagement, while George [9] demonstrated that teachers' opinions on cooperative learning strategies positively affected the academic performance and engagement of English language learners. Fitrianti [47] also found that teachers held a positive opinion of collaborative learning. However, the researchers did not find any studies with negative findings.

Furthermore, there were no statistically significant differences in EFL teachers' perceptions of implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms based on their teaching experience. This suggests that respondents' teaching experiences did not influence their perceptions of implementing collaborative learning. Possible reasons for these results include the well-known benefits of collaborative learning, common understandings within the teaching community, a focus on student-centered approaches, adaptation of teaching practices, and reliance on evidence-based educational strategies. Interestingly, the researchers did not find any studies that reported negative or supportive results in this regard. Additionally, there were no statistically significant differences in EFL teachers' perceptions of implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms based on gender. This indicates that gender did not play a role in affecting respondents' views on implementing collaborative learning. Possible reasons for these results may include the effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies in enhancing teamwork and peer learning skills, such as social intelligence. Studies suggest that the effectiveness of collaborative learning does not primarily depend on participants' gender but contributes to skill development without distinguishing between genders. Remarkably, the researchers did not find any research that reported negative or supportive findings in this context.

Finally, the findings of the content analysis revealed that teachers face problems in implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms, including managing diverse language proficiency, addressing cultural differences, ensuring impartial participation, managing group dynamics and conflicts, managing limited class time, accessing adequate resources, and lacking professional development and support. Reasons for the analysis findings may be due to the complexity of implementing collaborative learning and the need for strategies and support systems to address these issues. The qualitative findings of the current study are in line with those of Thanh [44], who found that a range of institutional and cultural barriers, such as those about work allocation, class size, and curriculum covering, further impeded collaborative

learning. Furthermore, the results of this study correspond with those of Celik et al. [45], whose findings demonstrated that the two biggest obstacles to introducing collaborative learning were the standardized EFL curriculum and students' attitudes. In the same vein, the content analysis results of this study corroborate those of Hinson [46], whose research highlights problems teachers face when implementing cooperative learning frameworks in the classroom, such as time constraints and teachers' lack of prior experience. Moreover, the study's outcomes support those of Nguyen et al. [50], who reported that the big class sizes, the amount of noise, and the lack of class control were commonly mentioned as constraints teachers encounter during cooperative learning.

Furthermore, the findings of the content analysis outlined many suggestions to address the implementation issues and make collaborative learning effective including, but not limited to, tailoring instruction methods to accommodate diverse student needs, encouraging students' active participation, effective time management, strategic grouping, creating a welcoming, and culturally diverse environment, assigning specific roles with rotation, and providing teacher training. Reasons for the content analysis findings may be attributed to the significance of adaptability, active participation, inclusiveness, structured methodologies, and teacher facilitation within diverse language learning settings. The study's thematic analysis results are consistent with those of Alias et al. [42], whose findings highlighted instructors' strong dedication to effectively implementing collaborative learning. Additionally, the study's findings align with those of George [9], who demonstrated how using the Jigsaw method increased students' motivation and improved the effectiveness of the collaborative learning environment. Furthermore, the findings of this study align with Yamada's [48] recommendations, which suggest that English teachers should actively engage students in collaborative tasks by utilizing value-centered team learning. Moreover, the results of this study corroborate those of Nguyen et al. [50], who offered suggestions for promoting collaborative learning, such as clearly outlining students' assignments, setting up a conducive learning atmosphere, and closely monitoring the groups.

Furthermore, the findings of this study hold substantial implications for both theoretical frameworks and practical applications in the realm of collaborative learning within EFL settings. The study's results support teachers' positive perceptions towards collaborative learning in EFL contexts, highlighting its benefits in enhancing student engagement, critical thinking, and overall learning experiences. Further, it provides practical insights into implementing collaborative learning strategies, such as tailoring instruction methods, encouraging active participation, and providing teacher training. The study suggests several areas for future research, including investigating the effectiveness of specific collaborative learning strategies, assessing the impact of collaborative learning on student outcomes, and examining the role of teacher training and professional development in implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms.

VI. CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of EFL students' engagement in collaborative learning, focusing on implementation challenges and potential solutions. The findings indicated a strong disposition among EFL teachers towards implementing collaborative learning in EFL classrooms, with a notably high degree of perception regarding the benefits of teamwork, enhancing students' learning effectiveness, and the dominance of group decision-making over individual decisions. Moreover, teaching experiences and gender did not yield statistically significant differences in EFL teachers' perceptions regarding collaborative learning. Furthermore, the content analysis of the semi-structured interviews highlighted problems the teachers faced in implementing collaborative learning, including managing language skills, communication, conflict resolution, limited class time, and lack of resources. Suggestions included differentiated teaching, active participation, efficient time management, language skill grouping, and EFL-specific training.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on collaborative learning by shedding light on teachers' perspectives, challenges with implementation, and possible fixes. It emphasizes how enthusiastic EFL teachers put collaborative learning into practice and how cooperation can improve students' learning outcomes. The study concludes that instructors' opinions of collaborative learning are unaffected by their gender or past teaching experiences. Some implementation problems were noted, such as poor communication, difficulty resolving conflicts, class timings, and lack of available resources. It provides doable solutions to these problems, including differentiated instruction, student involvement, effective time management, language skill grouping, and training tailored to EFLs. The study, in particular, offers a thorough grasp of the general efficacy and difficulties of collaborative learning in EFL contexts because of its broad approach to investigating instructors' opinions without concentrating on particular forms or variants of the practice.

The researchers recognize the current study's limitations, such as the small sample size and the Arabic-native-speaking context and acknowledge that it may have impacted the generalizability of the findings. The small sample size of participants may have limited drawing broad conclusions about teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning in EFL classrooms. Additionally, the Arabic-native-speaking countries' context may have limited the applicability of the findings to other cultural, institutional, or linguistic contexts. Based on the current study limitations, the researchers propose further studies to replicate the findings of this study with larger sample sizes to provide a more comprehensive understanding of teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning in EFL classrooms. In addition, future studies should compare teachers' perceptions in Arabic-native-speaking countries with those in other cultural and linguistic contexts to identify cultural and linguistic differences that may impact teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning. Furthermore, future research directions can include the specific types or variations of collaborative learning to provide more nuanced insights into their effectiveness and challenges. The topics can delve deeper into the implementation issues identified in the current study, such as managing language skills, communication, conflict resolution, limited class time, and lack of resources. Future studies can explore how cultural and linguistic differences impact teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning. In addition, future studies can consider the study level (e.g., primary, secondary, tertiary) and other components of collaborative learning (e.g., group size, task complexity) to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning. Moreover, longitudinal studies can also examine how teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning advance over time and how this impacts their implementation of collaborative learning strategies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors are thankful to the Deanship of Scientific Research at Najran University for funding this work, under the Research Groups Funding program grant code NU/RG/SEHRC/12/3.

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