

**Investigating the Impacts of Collaborative Learning on the Development of Speaking Skills
among EFL Learners in Bhutan**

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

I hereby declare that

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing my degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

The thesis titled “Investigating the Impact of Collaborative Learning on the Development of Speaking Skills among EFL Learners in Bhutan” submitted by Aruna Homagai (20203041) of fall, 2024 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts on 7th October 2024.

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Ethics Statement

The work in this paper is original, and the ideas mentioned in other journals and articles are cited duly. Additionally, ethical guidelines were followed strictly to gather information from the participants. More details are provided in the methodology chapter.

Abstract

Collaborative learning has gained increased attention in language learning, especially for its benefits in enhancing students' speaking skills and overall learning experiences. The study aims to investigate the impacts of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills among EFL learners in Bhutan. Bhutan's education system follows traditional, teacher-centered approaches, which focus on grammar and rote memorization, with less attention to speaking practice. This research investigates how collaborative learning can foster language proficiency, increased motivation, enhanced critical thinking skills, and the development of collaboration competencies. I have adopted a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews to conduct this research among the Bhutanese college students to gather insights into collaborative learning. The results show that collaborative learning significantly enhances speaking fluency, builds confidence, and increases vocabulary through group interactions, where students feel supported and encouraged to engage in verbal communication. Moreover, collaborative activities foster critical thinking and teamwork, addressing key gaps in Bhutan's traditional learning environment. This study seeks to support the successful integration of collaborative learning in language classrooms and make a lasting contribution to the ongoing advancement of spoken English education by summarizing current research and providing practical insights.

Key words: collaborative learning, speaking skills, confidence, fluency, group interactions

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Collaborative learning is an educational approach that involves students working in groups, or pairs to fulfill a common goal (Yang, 2023). This strategy allows students to share their unique abilities and viewpoints, resulting in an enriching educational atmosphere that improves both academic and interpersonal skills. Furthermore, it creates a friendly environment that motivates reserved people to take part more fully and enhances learning enjoyment and improves retention of knowledge through engaging activities in groups (Alrayh, 2018). This approach is in contrast to Bhutan's long-standing traditional teaching methods, which frequently emphasize rote memorization and private study. According to Kondrat (2024) collaborative learning in the education system fosters essential interpersonal abilities like communication, problem-solving, teamwork while accomplishing common objectives.

Bhutanese education previously placed a strong emphasis on rote memorization, which frequently hindered pupils' capacity for critical thought and effective expression (Rabgay, 2018). The need for more interactive, student-centered approaches like collaborative learning to promote deeper student participation and understanding has been acknowledged by recent educational reforms. In order to help teachers implement transformative methods of instruction, the Bhutanese Ministry of Education has started offering training courses. The goal of this course is to enable educators to design more dynamic classrooms that foster cooperation and cooperative problem-solving abilities. According to studies, putting collaborative learning techniques into practice has improved students' academic achievement overall and their ability to communicate in English. For example, when compared to conventional teaching approaches, a study of fourth-grade pupils showed that collaborative learning significantly improved their English language proficiency (Dendup & Onthanee, 2020). The COVID-19

pandemic forced Bhutanese schools to embrace more independent and collaborative learning strategies. Even with obstacles such as restricted access to technology, inadequate teacher preparation, and cultural reliance on conventional approaches, students could do collaborative learning.

However, a lot of classrooms in Bhutan do not fully prioritize collaborative learning. Conventional teaching approaches continue to be predominant, emphasizing teacher-led instruction and individualized learning. There has been increasing concern over time regarding Bhutan's educational system. A study shows that Bhutanese also have low critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills (Rabgay, 2018). The Royal Education Council, (2011), students struggle to meet grade-level requirements in basic and advanced academic subjects and basic communication and analytical skills. In today's interconnected world, communicating effectively is crucial for personal, involvement in social, professional, and academic settings. Though, many people including Bhutanese students have trouble speaking and find it challenging to develop these skills (Rabgay, 2018).

The reasons could be due to the traditional lecture-based method where the teacher takes centre stage and plays a dominant role. Traditional lecture-based techniques sometimes result in learning that is passive, when learners are simple consumers of knowledge without active engagement. This may lead to decreased motivation and retention rates (Abadi, 2015). Better academic achievement and a deeper knowledge of the material require active participation. The students need more opportunities to talk, share ideas, or ask questions (Fatimah, 2019). Traditional lecture-based environment has resulted in poor academic performance (Royal Education Council, 2011). Students have become passive learners without opportunities to participate actively in the learning process. Maintaining traditional teaching practices might

hinder students' academic advancement. In order to meet global educational standards, interactive and participative environments for learning are crucial. Using cutting-edge teaching techniques can raise student achievement levels overall. Instead of serving as the exclusive source of knowledge, the teacher facilitates learning in a student-centered classroom. Students may feel more active and accountable for their education in a more dynamic and stimulating learning environment as a result of this change. According to Dorji (2005) an old lecture-based teaching approach that is still widely used, students also rely entirely on their teachers to make all of their decisions. It further stated that if Bhutan continues to follow the conventional approach to teaching and learning, the standard of education will inevitably stay the same, hampering students' learning process in various fields. A change from teacher-centred to student-centred learning is required to improve education in Bhutan (Sherab & Dorji, 2013).

Despite English being the medium of instruction, Bhutanese students retake IELTS to obtain the required band (LaPrairie, 2014). The requirement that students in Bhutan retake the IELTS speaks to a larger problem that affects English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners globally. According to research done in several nations, this is a global problem. Studies show that many children find it difficult to meet the necessary competence levels, which might limit their chances for success in school and in the workplace. It not only hampers academic performance but also limits the students' opportunities in various fields. Although to address these issues the institutions have employed techniques such as traditional teaching techniques, it's possible that these approaches may not be most effective for improving their speaking abilities. The central question is how collaborative learning has a positive impact on the development of speaking skills among EFL learners that would lead to a higher level of student engagement in speaking activities compared to traditional learning methods. To understand

better the stand of Bhutan and its inclusive learning through a collaborative approach and development of speaking skills would be studied with efforts to draw better conclusions in the education institutions.

Research Problem

The student's poor performance in speaking skills is due to a lack of opportunities, and time to practice speaking skills in class as well as the use of traditional speaking instructional methods. Moreover, traditional teaching methods often focus on grammar, memorization, and writing rather than speaking. Hence the study attempted to find out the impacts of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills.

Developing speaking skills among second language learners is still a major and urgent concern, especially in a country like Bhutan as Bhutan's education system follows a conventional teaching methodology that prioritizes reading and writing, creating a gap between students' language proficiency. Moreover, effective communication is crucial for both personal and professional success (Wangmo, 2019). According to the research, students frequently need help to develop fluency, coherence, and confidence in their speaking abilities. The Bhutanese education system follows a traditional educational methodology, a centred teaching method, and memorization (LaPrairie, 2014). As stated by Rabgay (2018) "this teaching method hardly uses innovative teaching techniques and instructional practices are not constructive" (p. 266). Moreover, a prevalent problem is the lack of emphasis on collaborative learning as a teaching tactic to improve speaking among EFL learners in Bhutan. Traditional methods often emphasize solitary learning through lectures, textbook readings, and individual projects rather than group projects and do not necessarily give students enough chances to improve their speaking skills in a real-life context (Wangmo, 2019). Therefore, addressing this issue is paramount to find out

how collaborative learning impacts the development of speaking skills among EFL learners of Bhutan.

In Bhutan, English serves as a medium for educational progress, cultural exchange, and economic growth. There is a growing need for effective communication with the increase of Bhutanese students participating in global exchange programs and other opportunities. Bhutan's educational system is trying to keep up with current developments and adjust to new approaches to ensure students acquire strong communication skills. Thus, researchers and educators are looking into strategies like collaborative learning to close this gap.

Even though speaking abilities are becoming increasingly important in various sectors, many Bhutanese schools continue to teach speaking skills using the old, teacher-centered technique. Students struggle to communicate effectively since they do not have many opportunities to practice speaking. This paper illustrates both the positive aspects and the challenges that come with overcoming the difficulties so that they can search for solutions before putting the idea into practice in the classroom.

Research Gap

The existing literature shows the potential advantages of collaborative learning focusing on the Western countries like Australia, America, and Europe. . To date, few studies explored the effects of collaborative learning but there is a significant lack of research on how collaborative learning impacts EFL learners in the Bhutan setting where traditional, teacher-centered learning is dominant. However, regarding the impact it has on the development of speaking skills, it is given little consideration, this work aims to address this research gap by examining the direct impacts of collaborative learning on speaking skills, areas that are understudied within the context of the Bhutan education environment.

Personal Experience- Why I Became Interested in Conducting This Research

In Bhutan, I was not acquainted with collaborative learning, which had a negative impact on both my social and academic experiences. There was little opportunity for student contact or teamwork in the conventional educational system, which placed a strong emphasis on mindless memorization, written assessments and leaving very little room for oral communication. Moreover, we had to talk in an orderly manner with accurate grammar in order not to be judged by a teacher and an entire class. This leads to limited interactions between teachers and students and even minimal student-to-student interaction. My capacity to interact with peers was hampered by this lack of collaborative chances, which limited my social development and hampered my overall progress as a learner. A significant turning point in my academic career occurred when I moved to Bangladesh to begin my undergraduate studies. I found myself in a vibrant setting where different courses actively promoted collaborative learning. My educational experience was completely changed by the collaborative atmosphere that was fostered by faculty members through the implementation of group projects and peer discussions. Cooperation with classmates increased my confidence and communication abilities while also helping me grasp the subject matter better. This beneficial shift has had a significant impact on me and given me the intellectual and social abilities I need to succeed in a variety of settings.

Research Purpose

In light of the above research problem, the purpose of this study is to collect insights on the impacts of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills among EFL learners and its potential benefits for students. Such qualitative information will serve to fill in current gaps of knowledge on the impacts of collaborative learning on the development of speaking

skills as most schools in Bhutan follow the traditional method also known as the lecture-based or didactic approach. The language learners will be aware of successful speaking skill-enhancement strategies and how collaborative learning can improve speaking abilities.

Additionally, it will educate the students on the advantages of collaborative learning and motivate them to engage in such activities to enhance their speaking skills. The educators will learn much about the benefits of incorporating collaborative activities, identifying more effective teaching strategies, and increasing student engagement. Policymakers can utilize the study's findings to encourage more collaborative learning strategies in the classroom. Ultimately, it might improve and make everyone a good communicator which is critical in both daily life and numerous professions.

To achieve the above-mentioned goals, I investigated the following research questions through my study:

1. How does collaborative learning impact the speaking skills of ESL learners?
2. What are the benefits and challenges that students find in collaborative learning activities to improve their speaking skills?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I will present a review of the literature on the impacts of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills among EFL learners. It will mostly emphasize scholarly works and studies that address collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills.

Definitions and Principles of Collaborative Learning

According to Sharan & Sharan (1992), collaborative learning involves groups of students working together to complete a task or create a product. It includes only students, or students with teachers at times. Often students are in groups of two or more students working together to come to an understanding about something, finding the solution to a problem, or developing a product. This approach encourages students to come together to accomplish a task or shared objective by exchanging ideas. This method encourages student interaction, cooperation, and mutual support, all leading to active learning. By working together and sharing experiences, students can develop socially and intellectually (Warsah et al., 2021). In addition, rather than working alone, students typically collaborate in groups (Nastasi & Clements, 1991). According to Yang (2023), they have similar objectives that they seek to achieve. Success is determined by each student's aggregate progress rather than by the efforts of a single person. Therefore, each student's success is dependent on the success of a group as a whole which promotes cooperation, support, and a sense of shared accountability for learning objectives. Gerlach (1994) stated that collaborative learning is indeed a socio-natural process in which learners engage in themselves. It is through the talk that learning occurs. Additionally, it recognizes each student's accomplishments and efforts. Students have ample opportunity to practice and develop social skills, which are beneficial in both their personal and professional lives.

Speaking Skills and their Importance

In the modern world, communication is essential to the survival of society. It is also mentioned that speaking is one of the most crucial of the four language abilities. However, McLaren et al., (2005), have also noted that speaking is one of the more challenging abilities that most people encounter. Even after years of study, EFL learners struggle to use their language skills in practical settings. Although speaking abilities are crucial in many domains and their significance, speaking has received less attention in language education, with a greater emphasis on reading and writing (Shteivi & Hamuda, 2016). Though they have historically been underappreciated, speaking abilities are now more important than ever in the modern workplace since they are necessary for presentations, debates, group discussions, and job interviews. In each of these fields, good communication is essential for both career progression and employability (Rao, 2019).

Furthermore, speaking fluently fosters confidence and enhances relationships because it allows one to interact with people from various backgrounds, promoting engagement in various social and professional contexts. Speaking fluently is also essential for career advancement and employability. A person with strong speaking abilities can enthrall an audience, motivate listeners, and successfully communicate ideas that help them succeed in both their personal and professional lives (Rao, 2019). However, most of the learners are aware of the importance of speaking skills. In reality, there are lots of EFL learners who face challenges in speaking. Learners who are poor in speaking skills tend to need more vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar which are part of linguistic problems. This not only impacts students' development of speaking skills but also influences psychological issues that are related to emotions, physical

problems, and self-productivity resulting in a lack of self-confidence, nervousness, and shyness while speaking (Riadil, 2020).

Moreover, there are some problems in speaking activities such as inhabitation, nothing to say, uneven participation, and mother tongue use. While speaking in a second language is a bit different and challenging than reading, writing, or listening, we communicate in real-time with the people around us or the group around us. This can make the students nervous as they would be worried about making mistakes and being criticized (Shabani (2013). This inhibition makes it challenging for them to speak up in a language they are learning. There are times when students complain that they cannot say anything and they do not have any courage to express their thoughts. When the students cannot speak up, it results in low participation during the activities, and most of the opportunities are taken by the ones who talk the most. According to Abadi (2015), collaborative learning will not only help in the development of speaking skills but also knowledge, the development of certain skills, critical and creative thinking, and providing a range of opportunities to overcome psychological difficulties.

Benefits of Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning has been widely recognized as an effective and efficient means of facilitating meaningful and purposeful interaction between and among the learner and teacher and between learners themselves (yang, 2023). Haidra (2016), although students excel in writing, reading, and listening, they struggle with effective speaking. Collaborative learning is a possible solution that students can use to overcome their speaking challenges (Haidara 2016). Despite certain limitations of cooperative learning, the author concludes based on the proven evidence of its benefits. Collaborative learning is advised for implementation in educational institutions due to its benefits in reducing language anxiety, influencing student participants, increasing students'

self-confidence, and improving their speaking skills. Collaborative learning activities allow teachers to create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that supports the growth of well-rounded, self-assured, and competent students.

Reducing Anxiety

The collaborative learning approach reduces the language anxiety that foreign language learners experience as the students feel the classroom environment is threatening (Dornyei, 2002). Moreover, it reduces anxiety in learners by providing a safe space where fewer students collaborate and share ideas, making it easier for them to feel at ease and free from concerns about being judged by their teacher and the entire class. Students also feel more at ease speaking English in small groups, even when they make mistakes, than when speaking in front of the entire class (Dalisa, 2015). Besides that, there will be less likelihood of being judged by teachers and the entire class as the stress of making grammatical and pronunciation errors when speaking can diminish. (Dornyei, 2002). Furthermore, Alrayah (2018) stated that collaborative learning creates a relaxing environment where students feel more comfortable using English even if they are not comfortable in their language skills. He further stated that when students are engaged in group activities, they are less concerned with making mistakes since the emphasis is on group support rather than individual performance, lowering the anxiety and increasing the engagement.

Additionally, the collaborative learning approach emphasizes mutual support, and idea sharing rather than competing with one another. For instance, a play or a group presentation requires cooperation from all the members to achieve a good performance that inspires students to take part and meet the shared objectives. As a result, collaborative learning gives social support from peers which lowers the anxiety about speaking in front of others and promotes cooperation as mentioned by Dornyei (2002). Working in groups helps individuals develop trust

because they can express their emotions honestly without worrying about being criticized. The thought that their friends would appreciate their attempts to contribute makes shy students want to put in the necessary effort or take the steps needed to improve their speaking skills.

Additionally, trust will reduce anxiety in communicating their thoughts in the target language by fostering a supportive environment (Gregersen, 1999).

Active Participation

Alayah (2018) mentions collaborative learning is particularly effective in fostering language development. Students start engaging in the learning process and conversations once they feel more at ease and less anxious. Consequently, this leads to active involvement in learning, error correction, and constructive feedback (Smith & Flaherty, 2013). In addition to offering a nurturing learning atmosphere, it offers more opportunities for learners to practice speaking and develop language skills through authentic communication and interaction with peers. The significance of providing opportunities for students to communicate is emphasized in the Manurung (2015) article. Looking at the settings of certain schools, such as those in Indonesia, where classes had between thirty and forty students. Furthermore, there are two English study hours per week, which means that students have very little chance to practice speaking during that period. Nonetheless, collaborative learning gives students the chance to utilize language in meaningful contexts, which enhances their language skills (McDonough & Foote, 2015).

Besides increasing the participation of the students in the speaking activities, it also makes the students responsible for their projects. Learning through collaborative activities in which each student is accountable for their work and has a specific role to play. For instance, in jigsaw puzzle activities where each student is required to exchange knowledge with the other

members of the group and has a specified role. Students get involved and responsible for their participation as a result of all of these. Additionally, students will understand the value of their input and grow more accountable for their learning. Collaborative learning, in general, boosts student engagement by providing students with greater options, a certain amount of personal accountability, and the capacity to take charge of their engagement in the activities (Gregesen, 1999).

Increasing Self Confidence

Student's self-esteem and confidence grow as a result of peer cooperation. Student's self-confidence eventually grows as a result of the decreased anxiety and increased speaking opportunities like presentations and group work (Briggs, 2014). Additionally, it offers social connections that improve one's self-esteem and confidence in oneself. Communicating thoughts, emotions, and interests to others is a necessary component of confidence. As a social result of our interactions with those around us, confidence and self-esteem are developed. The more students interact with one another in English the more confident they become in using English as a medium of communication (Anwar, 2016). Anwar (2016) and Gregerson (1999) also underpin the role of collaborative learning in enhancing confidence through feedback from peers and fostering supportive group dynamics. Anwar (2016) reveals that the students have a better feeling about themselves when there is some positive reinforcement by peers, which strongly motivates students to believe in their speaking abilities. Gregersen (1999) agrees that students are more likely to take risks and contribute to a conversation once they know and feel that they are supported and accepted by their peers. Students get feedback from other participants in cooperative learning. Positive peer feedback gives the students more self-assurance and solidifies their belief in their abilities. Overall, cooperating learning creates a supportive and non-

judgmental society where students feel valued, and supported. Through collaboration with their peers, students gain confidence, reduce anxiety, and increase participation.

Challenges of Implementing Collaborative Learning

Despite the benefits to collaborative learning, various problems create obstacles to the effectiveness of collaborative learning in educational settings. Students' dependence on others, social conflicts from differences in opinion, and the time-consuming nature of activities within groups can impact both engagement and learning outcomes.

Dependency

There are disadvantages even though the evidence mentioned above that collaboration reduces anxiety might be true. To begin with, it's a group task, so the team as a whole must complete it. This creates a sense of dependency among the students since they believe someone else might be able to finish the task (Gregerson, 1999). An additional argument raised in the paper stated that peer collaboration has been demonstrated to affect students' perceptions of their success and failure as a team which in turn triggers students' willingness to contribute to the group as their mistake would be cause of group failure. Peer collaboration sometimes results in social problems where students may feel disrespected and lose the courage to speak up. If there is no mutual regard or understanding, they may laugh or make fun of each other's opinions of their members. As a result, students will become less confident and might not speak up or offer ideas, ultimately making them feel more anxious (Järvelä et al., 2010).

Social Conflict

According to Lee et. al. (2015), peer collaboration might result in social problems that impede students' learning and task completion. Students experience social conflict when they cannot reach an agreement because of their egos sticking to their own opinions rather than

considering other people's perspectives, which makes them less engaged in the activity.

Furthermore, some teachers encounter challenges while switching from conventional methods to centered cooperative learning activities (Yulianto, 2019). However, there are further challenges because of the lack of resources regarding classroom facilities and materials. Purnama (2018) notes that implementing cooperative learning effectively requires having access to sufficient resources, such as technology, a variety of educational materials, and physically configured classrooms that support group work.

Time-Consuming

The process of dividing students into groups, having them coordinate their work, hold conversations, finish the assignment, come up with a solution as a group, and then present it in class can make collaborative learning time-consuming. This will be difficult to complete in the allotted time. Furthermore, because students' performance in collaborative learning is influenced by a variety of circumstances and is interconnected with that of their peers, it is impossible to evaluate each student's unique contributions or growth (Yang, 2013).

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I will discuss my research design in detail and provide rationale for the methodological choices I made while designing and conducting my research. I will first discuss the research approach, then I will discuss the research participants, and then I will deliberate the data collection and analysis procedure followed in my study.

Research Approach

For this research, I adopted a qualitative methodology for data collection and analysis. The methodology is an important part of research for ensuring credibility, liability and transparency. Davis (1998) argues that “the natural subjectivity of qualitative research, for which it is criticized the most, is its greatest strength” (p.19). He also stated that qualitative research explores problems, settings, processes, and social groups allowing the researchers to enter into a naturalistic setting to find the solutions to complex problems of today's world.

As opinions on the impact of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills among the EFL learners of Bhutan depend on self-efficiency, educational propriety and personal history, the qualitative method is most appropriate which brings the best answers from different participants and the most relevant to this investigation would be the qualitative method. Qualitative methodology deals with collecting and analyzing non-numerical information on the perception and experiences of people. Qualitative research allowed me for in-depth exploration of students' personal experiences, giving detailed insights into how collaborative learning impacts their speaking skills. Thus, this research uses a qualitative research approach particularly a phenomenological approach to analyze the effects of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills. This study is particularly suited to this research as it gives a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the students in the context of language learning within its real-

life context. Adopting the phenomenological method allowed me to gain insights into personal experiences by exploring their lived experiences. Furthermore, understanding in-depth subject matter is the main aim of qualitative research as it gives opportunities to an individual to many different aspects from the students' perspectives.

Moreover, it is helpful to know about collaborative learning and have a general idea of the effects of collaborative learning in the context of EFL learners through interviews and analyzing the responses in detail. Furthermore, the phenomenological study undertaken here tallies with a qualitative study in this regard and hence is very informative. It allows me to find the practical approaches of educators and opens the way for further development in language teaching. Therefore, this method helps to find the impacts of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills among EFL learners of Bhutan and create effective teaching strategies, approaches, and learning environments for the development of speaking skills.

Participants

According to Arcury and Quandt (1999), "the rationale for selecting specific participants must reflect the purpose or goals of the study, allowing the investigator to find representative individuals who have the characteristics being considered by the investigation" (p. 128). The qualitative method involves semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with seven students, those who consented during the official talk and were willing to participate in the research are the chosen participants. The study involved seven Bhutanese students, whom I reached through Facebook. Out of nine, seven of them agreed to be part of my research. These participants were chosen because of their firsthand experience in collaborative learning in college. The participants from private and public institutions with different semesters get diverse perspectives. Three of them are from private universities and four of them are from public universities. These

individuals are my friends and my cousins currently studying in colleges of Bhutan. Notably, I observed certain changes in their speaking skills after they engaged in collaborative learning in college. I have met them in a variety of school-related settings, including clubs, campaigns, and other events. As a result, they could offer personal knowledge of how collaborative methods affected their speaking abilities. Their experiences directly relate to the purpose of the study.

The current literature is pertinent to the research questions and the study goal is also included in this investigation.

The following criteria are utilized for the selection of participants in this study:

1. The participants are currently Bhutanese college students.
2. The university students are from different semesters and diverse backgrounds.
3. The students who volunteered to be part of this study and share their experience.

Name of the participants	Year	University
Karma	2 nd	Private
Dorji	1 st	Public
Pema	3 rd	Public
Thinley	3 rd	Public
Phuntsho	3 rd	Private
Tshoki	2 nd	Public
Kuenzang	3 rd	Private

Figure 1: Demographic information about the participants

Research Site

For the study, I recruited Bhutanese students as my participants. The interview was conducted in person with the private and public universities of students studying in Bhutan. I have selected the students of both private and public colleges of Bhutan located in different districts to get diverse insights into collaborative learning. Public colleges have a diverse range of students from various socio-economic backgrounds. It adopts a national curriculum set by the Ministry of Education. On the other hand, private universities of Bhutan are autonomous and flexible, they can set their curriculum that suit the needs of the students. They offer a variety of curriculum and educational needs to cater different needs of students. Participants came from socio-economic different backgrounds and shared their unique perspectives on collaborative learning. After discussions with the participants, we selected a convenient place (my home) and my friend's café for an interview to provide a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere for discussions about collaborative learning. The selected locations were easily accessible and the most convenient setting to meet face to face and do the interview without distractions in a quiet room.

Data Collection

To gather study data, participants were first approached, informed of the study's goals, and assured that their identity and personal information would remain confidential. To collect data, I used the interview method. The interview of this study was conducted in a face-to-face manner with the participants to gather their opinions and experiences. I used semi-structured interviews for my study because it is considered to be flexible. The interviews of this study were conducted in a face-to-face manner with the college students of Bhutan. The duration of each interview was around 40 to 50 minutes. A mobile recorder was used to capture the participants' responses to semi-structured questions, followed by broader questions. The semi-structured

interview allowed me for a deeper exploration of their experiences with collaborative learning. It also enabled me to follow up questions about their experiences, the impact of collaborative learning, the benefits and the challenges they face during group activities. Additionally, throughout the interviews, which were audiotaped for data transcription, the chosen participants openly expressed their viewpoints and practices and provided rich and detailed information.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using a thematic approach, facilitating the identification of various viewpoints and well-organized data. Initially, the participants were selected, and the data was gathered and each interview was transcribed from the audio recordings. I translated the ones which were in their native language (Dzongkha and Lhotsampa). A table was made and transcribed for each participant following the question asked. Additionally, I listened to the audio recording twice to make sure I did not miss any information given by participants. I reviewed the transcribed data several times to make myself familiarized and to develop an overall understanding of the responses. After that, I started to work on my coding procedure after the initial review. I highlighted the most significant information and the meaningful key phrases from the responses. A coding scheme was applied which consists of both descriptive and interpretive codes. Descriptive coding helped in summarizing the key content of the participant's responses, allowing me to identify major themes within the data by grouping the different aspects of collaborative learning which are shared by the participants. For example, codes such as confidence, motivation, and engagement were assigned to relevant segments of text, reflecting the main ideas expressed by participants. The interpretation helped me to delve deeper into responses given by participants, which captured the deeper meanings and implications based on the experiences of what participants expressed such as overcoming anxiety. These codes helped

me to understand how collaborative learning experiences impacted speaking skills. When the coding was completed, these themes were grouped into categories based on their similarity to one another. Once themes were categorized, those most pertinent for discussion were selected for closer examination based on their relation to the study's research questions. To sum up, data was analyzed I thematically after listening to all the collected data and then grouping thematically according to the use of descriptive and interpretive code that the participants used.

Ethical Consideration

For this research, I made sure to follow ethical considerations. The participants were treated fully with respect and fairness. I shared information about my study to the participants through email attachment where I explained what the study was about, the purpose of the research, why it was relevant, why their participation was important and the methods used (Appendix 1). I explained the benefits of this study for students and teachers. I assured them that their information would be kept confidential and only used for research purposes for my study. I shared semi-interview questions to them and informed them that they can decline answering questions and also from being interviewed. The interviews were conducted at their convenience. The participants were entirely voluntary. Their data and responses were kept personal. To keep anonymity, pseudonym names were implied for each participant The pseudonyms were common Bhutanese names, allowing them to freely share their experiences without concern for their real names being linked to any responses.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the research findings of a qualitative study aimed at gathering insights from college students in Bhutan about the impact of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with current students at the College (university) in Bhutan. The study involved seven participants, each referred to by a pseudonym (Karma, Dorji, Pema, Thinley, Phuntsho, Tshoki, Kuenzang,) to protect their privacy. The interviews were transcribed, and coded, and the relevant data was categorized into general themes:

- 1: Impact of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills
- 2: Benefits of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills
- 3: Challenges of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills

Impacts of Collaborative Learning on the Development of Speaking Skills

In this section, I will discuss how collaborative learning impacts the development of speaking skills among the EFL learners of Bhutan that students reported, to address my first research question: *How does collaborative learning impact the speaking skills of EFL learners?* My participants shared their experience on the impact of collaborative learning and stated how group activities such as group discussions, presentations and projects impacted their speaking skills which I will share in detail in this section.

Improved Fluency Level

Each of the participants expressed their fluency level. Reminiscing on their own experiences in improving fluency levels pre- and post-collaborative learning. The reflections by the participants show the impact of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills. In the beginning, most participants entered collaborative learning with basic fluency in speaking

while their reading and writing skills were strong. The gap between their ability to write and read fluently versus their struggle with speaking shows that traditional learning in Bhutan emphasizes rote memorization and written assessments leaving little room for oral communication. However, after switching to collaborative learning at college, there was an improvement in speaking for all participants. Pema and Kuenzang also observed improvement in fluency after a year of collaborative learning, though they were good readers and writers, they were weak at speaking. Collaborative learning which encourages interaction, discussion, and verbal practice helped to bridge the gaps between the receptive and productive skills. Pema said that her fluency has gone from basic to intermediate, it shows how collaborative learning raised her communicative skills. Pema mentioned,

I am fluent in writing and reading but I struggled with speaking and listening. I can read books and write in English but I cannot speak properly with everyone. However, I could see some changes in my speaking skills after a year of joining collaborative learning in college. My overall fluency is currently intermediate though it was basic before I joined college.

Similarly, Karma, Thinley, and Phuntsho added that although they had faced problems in vocabulary, flow, and anxiety in the beginning. Collaborative learning enhanced confidence and fluency and speaking improved considerably. As can be seen from the table, all participants moved further into the higher levels of fluency, and speaking anxiety significantly improved, as did pronunciation and overall fluency. This opportunity for engaging in collaborative activities, like group discussions and presentations, provided them with opportunities to practice speaking within a supportive and less evaluative context which helped to improve the flow of speech, increased vocabulary, and reduced anxiety. It is evident from the participant experiences that

collaborative learning has a positive impact on the development of speaking skills offering opportunities for students to practice and confidence to develop their fluency, particularly in an environment where traditional teaching methods would have restricted their verbal communication skills. Thinley and Phuntsho have given their statements in more general assessments mentioning that his overall fluency was “not very fluent, I would describe as basic” and “currently intermediate” respectively. Karma mentioned,

My speaking skills were less fluent, and I sometimes struggled with complex vocabulary and maintaining flow in conversations. However, it is getting much better. Overall fluency is intermediate, though it was basic till some time ago.

The following table illustrates the progress made and the persistent difficulties faced by the students.

Participants	Pre collaborative Fluency	Post Collaborative Fluency	Key Challenge
Thinley	Basic	Intermediate	Fluency and flow
Phuntsho	Basic	intermediate	Pronunciation
Kuenzang	Basic	Intermediate	Speaking anxiety
Karma	Basic	Intermediate	Fluency and flow
Dorji	Basic	Intermediate	Confidence and anxiety
Pema	Basic	Intermediate	fluency
Tshoki	Basic	Intermediate	Vocabulary gap

Table 2: Improvement in fluency after collaborative Learning

Regular Engagement in Collaborative Learning

All the participants involved in the research indicated that they engage in collaborative learning activities often within their English classes at the university. They pointed out that their instructors always encouraged group discussions, projects, and interactive sessions, which usually occur at least twice a week, that have enhanced their language learning, especially speaking and listening skills. Tshoki observed that contrary to the past practices where collaborative learning was not frequently observed, the frequency of involvement in these practices at the university level has improved self-confidence, especially in the area of communication. It is notably seen in the participants' experiences that traditional learning limited the chance for engagement, hindering the development of speaking since they are provided with little conversational practice. The students are evaluated based on their written assignments and exams, placing very little emphasis on speaking. Tshoki mentioned

It was all about traditional learning which is the transmission of knowledge by lectures, it involves a lot of reading, writing, and memorization. Those in the class are required to listen to the teachers, take down notes and passively soak in knowledge without being very much involved in the process. The kind of assessment commonly used in classroom instruction is writing ability as a central feature. We were evaluated on the written assignments and exams.

Similarly, Pema stated that these activities offer an opportunity to introduce ideas that could be learned as well as share the knowledge that could, in turn, inform one's delivery and benefit the academia. The majority of the participants are aware that, on average, 6–7 of their ten weekly classes include assignments, group projects, and presentations where students have to

work in pairs or groups, for example, to prepare for a presentation of different subjects, which allows the participants to actively practice English in a comfortable environment.

Building Confidence through Group Interaction

Most of the participants stated that taking part in group activities such as discussions, group projects, and presentations assisted them in becoming more confident in speaking English. Also their anxiety level decreased considerably and their fluency improved. Karma was able to overcome speaking anxiety and saw improvements in their speaking when they received it as a result of repeated practice in a supportive and non-judgmental environment of collaborative learning. This suggests that collaborative learning creates many opportunities for students to participate in group projects, presentations and discussions along with the non-judgmental and supportive environment that encourages students to participate regularly in presentations and group projects which gradually decreases their anxiety and increases confidence leading to improvement in speaking skills. Karma stated,

Collaborative learning offers many opportunities for group discussions, presentations and group projects. There is less pressure in groups as everyone in the group is learning and I did not feel judged as much as I expected in the beginning as I had a bad experience during my school days. The more I participated in group discussions and debates I found that my anxiety levels were decreasing and I was speaking fluently. In the initial stages, I was not very fluent in speaking but then slowly and gradually I gained the confidence to speak without having the break every few seconds to look for the words.

From the above quote, it is evident in how collaborative learning reduces the students' stress levels and provides them with a platform to improve their speaking skills.

Exposure to Diverse Perspectives

Another contributing factor to the development of the speaking skills of students is diverse perspectives. Findings reveal that Pema greatly benefitted from a collaborative learning setting in language development. Collaborative learning exposed her to diverse perspectives such as different speaking styles, and vocabularies. By interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds, students can learn various ways of speaking, expressing themselves, and vocabulary to add to their means of communication. It not only gives exposure to different cultures but also builds confidence and fluency. Moreover, collaborative group projects and discussions offer students real-world language practice opportunities, which facilitates the development of their speaking abilities. Pema claimed,

I was exposed to diverse speaking styles and vocabularies through my interactions with peers from different backgrounds. During one of my cultural projects, I was exposed to various new expressions and idioms from my group members, which made me comfortable speaking. Moreover, this exposure not only expanded my vocabulary but also boosted my confidence and fluency.

Boost Self-esteem

Positive reinforcement is a huge aspect of collaborative learning that significantly helps increase students' self-esteem and confidence. This indicates that collaborative learning creates a positive learning environment by making the students feel valued for their contributions which makes them feel needed in the group and this boosts their self-esteem which encourages them to perform better and speak out more frequently as illustrated. This encouraging environment promoted not just the intent to contribute but also enabled students to be less anxious in taking risks during communication leading to improvement in their speaking skills. Thinley's

experience shows that collaborative learning not only improves speaking skills but also creates a feeling of belonging and being valued and needed, which are key factors in improving speaking skills. Thinley explained,

Collaborative learning activities encouraged me to speak and share my thoughts within a group hence making me realize that my contributions were valuable. The daily activities provided opportunities to speak up and the comfortable expressing my thoughts and ideas within a group, which led to an increase in my confidence and self-esteem. Learning in groups made me feel valued and needed, which made me come out with factors that encouraged me to perform better and speak out, hence gaining fluency and confidence.

The Benefits of Group Learning

In this section, I will discuss the benefits of collaborative learning that students reported to have experienced in group activities to address my research question: What are the benefits that students find in collaborative learning activities to improve speaking skills? My participants shared their experience of participating in collaborative work and reported many benefits they experienced. Some of those are knowledge sharing, enhancing vocabulary, and developing critical thinking which I will share in detail in this section.

Knowledge Exchange

Group learning allows students to share knowledge amongst peers, and this would foster a better understanding of concepts and motivation. Collaborative allowed Karma to share knowledge among peers and by doing so, she learned more than she would have alone. This kept her interested and encouraged her to engage in the activity, the more she was engaged the more she participated. Karma pointed out that while contributing to group discussions and questions her peers gave her more opportunities to speak. This not only enhanced her speaking skills but

also expanded her understanding beyond her existing knowledge. Knowledge exchange in collaborative learning fosters curiosity, and increased engagement ultimately leading to improvement in their speaking skills. Karma claimed that,

Group learning has been very helpful since it enables us to exchange ideas and gain knowledge from one another. We become more interested in knowing more and gaining more knowledge from others since it would be more than what I already know and this has encouraged me to stay engaged and participate more. When I participated, I shared my part and questioned their part and this gave me opportunities to speak more and more.

Enriching Student's Vocabulary

Collaborative learning increases the quantity of conversation among students and enhances the quality of their vocabulary. Tshoki believed that collaborative learning offers real-life social interactions, where she could engage in conversations and ask for clarification, negotiation, and readjustment in her language to make the other person understand. This exposes them to more vocabularies and vocabulary grows as a result of exposure to a wider variety of words. When students have a large vocabulary, students can communicate more naturally and without stopping to look up words. This shows how collaborative learning improved speaking and expanded their vocabulary. Tshoki stated that Collaborative learning is designed more to make it simulate a social setting in the way language is used just like in real life. She further added,

Collaborative learning enables the students not only in quantity but also increases the efficiency of the conversation by engaging ourselves in requesting, clarifying, and negotiating the conversation during collaborative activities. In addition, in collaborative learning, we adjust our language to make ourselves understood by others. As such, it also

attempts to make others comprehend what is intended to be said. We speak in different ways to make the other understand or give attention to what he/she is saying by speaking in various ways. With these, we become more aware of using the correct words and also expand our vocabulary and we can speak fluently.

Developing Critical Thinking

Collaboration enhances critical thinking by offering opportunities to analyze and evaluate diverse viewpoints. Kuenzang reveals that collaborative learning offers a joint discussion where learners question each other's reasoning and explain their concepts, evaluate various arguments, defend their points and solve problems together. To do so, students get involved and this process encourages deeper cognitive processing and problem-solving abilities, and improves their speaking skills because it gives them practice in expressing their ideas, and thoughts, defending their points and engaging in a conversation. Kuenzang noted that collaborative learning improves learners' critical thinking compared with individual learning. He added,

It happens when we are engaged in evaluating a peer's ideas. Sometimes during the group discussions, we question each other's reasoning and explain our concepts. This also exposes us to different viewpoints which I feel encourages us to analyze and evaluate various arguments. As such, collaborative learning fosters critical thinking through the problem-solving process. We get so much involved in the discussion which assists in enhancing their thinking abilities of the subject matter.

Increasing Motivation and Engagement

Collaborative learning encouraged engagement and motivated the students, impacting their speaking skills. The significance of motivation and engagement in collaborative learning is crucial for enhancing students' learning effectiveness. Several participants

expressed feeling that they are more motivated to participate in group activities than in individual tasks. As a result of dynamic interactions, teamwork, and feedback result in active participation. The following insights from participants illustrate how collaborative activities motivate them to contribute and engage them leading to improvement in their speaking skills.

Dynamic and Interactive Learning

Through collaborative activities, students not only become more motivated to participate but also more engaged in the learning process. This highlights that the interactive nature of collaborative learning breaks the monotony of traditional learning. Karma pointed out collaborative learning also breaks the monotony of traditional learning. This shift from traditional learning to collaborative learning encourages students to participate and share their views and ideas openly. Different opinions during activities such as group debates challenge students to think critically and push them to participate more actively. This also helps them practice speaking more often. Overall, these interactions lead to becoming better communicators. Such interactive components create a more dynamic learning process, which will positively influence students' speaking skills and their level of engagement. Karma noted that “different opinions during activities, like debates, challenge me mentally and push him to participate more actively”. Kuenzang noted collaborative activities break down boring teacher lectures. He stated,

It is a great strategy because it's all about the students and their thoughts and ideas which motivated and kept me engaged. I remember when there was a group debate, everyone brought a different viewpoint and experience to the table. The diverse perspectives of group members challenged my thinking which kept me motivated to contribute actively in the group.

Teamwork

Collaboration within groups promotes a sense of teamwork that boosts students' confidence and motivational levels benefitting the development of their speaking skills. Tshoki pointed out that from an individual mode of learning to a group mode her confidence and motivation to improve. Tshoki had always found that learning alone makes one reclusive and insecure. This indicates that collaboration not only creates a supportive environment for students but also gives them a platform to voice their opinions freely. Collaborative learning ingrains a sense of responsibility whereby students feel encouraged to participate. Similarly, Dorji mentioned that such collaboration increases his involvement and makes the atmosphere more enlightening, hence establishing the fact that collaboration can improve students' confidence. Moreover, in collaborative learning students work together to achieve common goals. By working together for a common purpose, students develop a constructive attitude, which reinforces their motivation to participate in discussions, hence improving their speaking ability. When students share responsibility for the outcome, they are motivated to make their contributions heard clearly, and this helps build confidence and fluency in speaking. Tshoki believes collaborating to achieve common goals encourages a positive attitude of teamwork which can be seen as "lacking in solo activities". She stated,

Through my experience from school where it was all about learning individually to college where learning is all in a group. I felt learning alone makes us [students] more likely to be reclusive and unconfident. When we share the responsibility for the outcome, this motivates me to contribute the best effort. Therefore, my motivation comes from working with others which encourages me to get engaged compared to the isolation of working alone.

Challenges Faced in Group Activities

In this section, I will discuss the challenges of collaborative learning that students experience through group activities to address my second research question: *What challenges of collaborative learning do students find in the development of speaking skills?* I will discuss the challenges such as coordination problems, unequal participation, and trust issues reported by the participants in detail.

Coordination Problems

Despite the many benefits of collaborative learning, coordination issues present significant challenges for students. Karma being asked about the challenges in collaborative learning pointed out the most common challenge is the coordination problem. Karma stated that in collaborative learning, students struggle with the equal division of tasks among the members leading to disorganized groups. This indicates that when there is an unequal division of tasks among the members, it leads to a disorganized group. Disorganized groups without a proper division of roles and responsibilities lead some dominant members to take over, leaving few opportunities for the quieter ones to speak up. In this kind of environment, usually less confident and introverted students would miss the opportunity to speak up. In addition to this, disorganized groups lead to poor time management which leads to often spending too much time on certain tasks and not everyone getting enough time and opportunities to share or speak up. It also hinders the effectiveness of collaborative learning as students miss out on chances to participate. Karma expressed,

There have been coordination issues such as dividing tasks among members and ensuring everyone contributes equally. I have experience in an unorganized group setting, the less confident and the introverted students often don't get a chance to speak, leading to a

missed opportunity to improve their speaking skills. Moreover, it creates a stressful environment that inhibits speaking. Sometimes it becomes challenging to manage time due to a disorganized group and everyone may not get to speak up.

The lack of distinction between roles and responsibilities in each task led to poor coordination of the group work and became very pressurizing, which further compromised effective contribution to the group work. Similarly, Pema brought up the fact that all of them go at different paces. She stated, “Some move too quickly while the other members can be slower which makes it challenging to align tasks and progress within the group”.

Unequal Participation

In addition to coordination, participants present challenges like unequal participation. Phuntsho stated in collaborative learning, there is unequal participation as some group members dominate the discussions while others struggle to speak up. This imbalance of participation hinders the development of speaking skills for those who do not speak up. This indicates that dominant participants in collaborative learning often drown out their quiet peers, leaving them little chance of finding an opportunity to state their opinions. This disparity, apart from limiting the chances for quieter members to practice and improve their speaking. Phuntsho reported,

Unequal participation due to some members being dominant while quiet and less confident remaining silent. The quieter ones find it difficult or struggle to find opportunities to speak and hesitate to express their ideas. Sometimes during the group presentation, just one of me did most of the talking while others contributed minimally since they were too shy to open up and share their ideas. So, I feel unequal participation prevents members from practicing and improving their speaking skills. Therefore, unequal participation hampers speaking skills.

Trust Issues

Trust is a major variable that ensures the success of collaborative learning yet it can be a challenge in group learning. When there are no personal connections and trust among the group members, it reduces engagement and surface-level communication. A relationship that is impersonal within group members is always characterized by no interest and no active participation. Thinley shared that there are times when group members' connections are impersonal and they disagree to work together. It reduces the sharing of ideas openly and working together to achieve a common goal. This lack of active participation not only limits active participation but also meaningful conversation among members which is crucial for improving speaking skills. Additionally, Dorji pointed out that “peer collaboration sometimes results in social conflict where they don’t agree to consider other opinions”. Students experience social conflict when they cannot reach an agreement because of their egos sticking to their own opinions rather than considering other people's perspectives which reduces the active participation, further hampering collaboration. In collaborative learning, this dynamic may hinder students' ability to successfully practice and improve their speaking abilities. Thinley stated,

They act uninterested resulting in an unwillingness to participate actively in a group. Collaboration often requires trust and understanding which is easier to establish when there is trust between the members. This has many times reduced the sharing of an idea, and problem-solving and limited creativity resulting in superficial communication. So, they are hesitant to share their ideas.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this section, I will be presenting a discussion of the findings drawing upon the participant's experience on the impacts of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills and relevant literature.

Impacts of Collaborative Learning on the Development of Speaking Skills

This section will discuss how collaborative learning such as group activities, interactions, and presentations impact the development of speaking skills.

Enhancing Speaking Skills through Collaborative Learning

Most participants highlighted the disparity between their reading/writing and speaking/listening skills. This indicates that these students have had more practice and confidence in reading and writing in English. Their academic environment likely emphasized reading textbooks, articles, and writing assignments, contributing to their stronger reading and writing proficiency. This represents the gap between their receptive and productive skills. The inconsistency between participant's fluency in reading/writing compared to speaking/listening is consistent with the literature and aligns with Schmitt (2010), learners tend to have higher proficiency in receptive skills (reading and listening) than in productive skills (speaking and writing). This could be attributed to the fact that receptive skills are passive compared to active productive ones that need more practice and confidence. Research has shown that collaborative learning can alleviate these disparities by offering an environment that encourages practices in speaking and listening. According to Johnson and Johnson (1987), speaking skills can be improved through group work and interactive activities because there are more chances for verbal practice. This is evidenced by the experiences shared by participants in pre- and post-collaborative learning where collaborative activities resulted in enhancing their speaking skills. After switching to collaborative learning at college, there was an improvement in speaking of all

participants. Pema and Kuenzang also observed improvement in fluency after a year of collaborative learning, despite being good readers and writers, they were weak at speaking. Collaborative learning which encourages interaction, discussion, and verbal practice helped to bridge the gaps between the receptive and productive skills.

Regular Engagement in Collaborative Learning

The frequencies of collaborative learning activities reported by participants differ, but they generally agree that frequent participation enhances learning aligns with Gillies's (2016) research that found regular and structured collaborative tasks are the most effective for language acquisition. The different frequencies at which the participants engage in collaborative tasks indicate varying levels of exposure that may affect their speaking skills' level of improvement. The difference between the collaborative and traditional approaches showcases the weaknesses of lecture-based systems in providing interactive language practice. Similarly, Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) have indicated that conventional methods tend to emphasize passive learning, thereby failing to meet learners' needs in terms of building communicative competence. The discontentment among participants concerning the conventional methods reinforces the need for integrating more interactive and collaborative components into language teaching.

Fostering Confidence and Fluency through Collaborative Learning

It can be concluded that collaborative learning significantly contributes to the learners' increased confidence, reducing anxiety, and boosting self-esteem and language fluency. Collaborative learning gives students a conducive environment, evaluating multiple options, and offering a lot of practice sessions in group presentations, debates, peer work and discussions which makes the student feel at ease using English. The nonjudgmental and supportive environment of collaborative learning encouraged the students to participate in group activities

which gradually reduced their anxiety and improved fluency. As stated by Karma the non-judgmental environment allowed her to overcome speaking anxiety which encouraged her to participate regularly in group activities gradually improving her speaking skills. This shows that collaborative learning creates a safe environment for students to practice speaking and improving their overall confidence and Fluency. Karma and Kuenzang experiences highlighted how important collaborative learning is in developing a context where EFL learners practice and enhance their speaking skills. This aligns with Alrayah (2018) mentions collaborative learning is particularly effective in fostering language development. Collaborative learning offers more opportunities for learners to practice speaking. Students start engaging in the learning process and conversations once they feel more at ease and less anxious. Likewise, Smith and Flaherty stated once students feel less judged it leads to active involvement in learning. It also mitigates learners' anxiety by creating a safe environment which encourages active participation. Karma stated group activities make participants gain more confidence through group interaction by expressing feelings without any prejudice. This open communication and supportive environment are really necessary to help learners in their gradual improvement of speaking because it will encourage regular participation and reduce anxiety. Additionally, Pema pointed out that exposure to diverse perspectives through group activities enhances speaking skills. They get exposed to a range of speaking techniques. This not only improves their speaking speed but also their general stand on the use of the language in different areas, highlighting the impact of collaborative learning. Pema's encounter with various speaking techniques in group activities is evidenced by Alahdal and Al Ahdal's (2019) assertion that confidence and fluency are boosted when learners employ the language in real life within group projects. They argue that real-life

language used occurs in group interaction, they learn new vocabulary from other cultures and greatly enhance speaking, confidence and fluency with the variety of speech.

Benefits of Collaborative Learning on the Development of Speaking Skills

In this section, I will discuss the benefits of collaborative learning reported by the participants. The numerous advantages pointed out by participants on the benefits of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills such as enhancing language proficiency through social interaction, knowledge exchange and vocabulary enrichment.

Expanding Vocabulary and Communication Skills

The benefits of group learning over individual learning are substantial, it enhances social interaction, and knowledge exchange, enhances the quality of students' vocabulary and develops critical thinking. Participants like Pema and Karma demonstrated that group learning encourages better interaction, which in turn builds up the confidence needed for language acquisition when it comes to expressing opinions and sharing knowledge. Collaborative learning, according to Tshoki, enriches vocabulary through real-life conversations and negotiation of meaning in group activities. They get exposed to more vocabulary which expands their vocabulary and helps them to express their ideas more clearly to make the other person understand. It also helped to hold engaging conversations and having a wide range of words made them feel confident in speaking. This aligns with Lin (2015) stated that in group activities students try to adjust the language to make themselves understood by others by engaging themselves in requesting and clarifying conversations. This way they get exposed to various new words. This expands vocabulary and improves the quality of student talk. Likewise, it also aligns with Namaziandost et al., (2020) that interactions among the students enhance speaking skills. This learning method promotes interaction and increases the richness of one's vocabulary by simulating real-life conversation as

According to Kuenzang, collaborative learning enhances critical thinking among students in the sense that it invites them to analyze and weigh various opinions. To do this they get involved in the process leading to speaking practice which aligns with McDonald's (2000) who stated collaborative learning encourages critical thinking through problem problem-solving process. Learners get actively engaged in discussions which fosters their minds to think critically, explain their concepts, and evaluate other opinions on the topic being discussed in the group. This gradually improves their speaking skills.

The Role of Dynamic Interaction in Boosting Students Motivation and Engagement

The motivation levels of the participants were slightly different as they mentioned different ways through which they got motivated. Karma's preference for the dynamic and interactive aspects of group projects shows how motivating techniques enhance learning by making it more enjoyable and less stressful. The dynamic and interactive nature of group activities breaks the monotony of traditional learning making the students more active participation. Kuenzang's insight on collaborative learning is a more effective way to learn than boring lecture formats (traditional learning) and emphasizes the significance of variety in maintaining motivation. This active participation gives opportunities for students to participate regularly, leading to better communication. Participants' cases support the views of Bozkurt et al., (2023) that the motivational approach to collaborative learning is built around dynamic interactions and clear goals of the learners. Additionally, teamwork contributes to boosting motivation and engagement. Tshoki stated that the transition from working alone to working in a group motivated and encouraged them to actively participate. Collaboration fosters a sense of responsibility among students as students need to work together to achieve a common goal. To achieve the common goals students get motivated to

speak up and share their ideas which in turn improves their speaking skills. Tshoki's emphasis on improved confidence and teamwork demonstrated the value of group cooperation in creating a positive and productive learning environment where students feel encouraged to contribute, helping them to grow as confident communicators. Tshoki believes collaborating to achieve common goals encourages a positive attitude of teamwork aligns Rogat et al., (2013) who stress the importance of sharing responsibility for a common outcome and motivate students to make contributions and get engaged in the activities. This helps to build confidence and fluency in speaking.

Engagement and motivation during collaborative learning sessions show a change in the higher levels of the number of students and the level of their interest. These experiences, shared by Tshoki and Kuenzang, highlight the value of collaborative learning in developing speaking skills by engaging and motivating the learners. This aligns with Hernandez (2012) and Laal and Ghodsi (2012) who pointed out that collaborative learning involves various components of interactivity that enhance student's performance and make the process of learning more motivating and engaging. Therefore, it can be concluded that collaborative learning not only helps create a more inclusive environment in the learning process but also makes the educational process more valuable.

Challenges of Collaborative Learning on the Development of Speaking Skills

This section will present the challenges experienced by the participants in group activities such as coordination problems, unequal participation and trust issues which hampered in the development of speaking skills.

Coordination Problem and Participation Imbalance

The difficulties that occur during group work are complex and align with the prior findings on collaborative learning. Hadwin et al., (2018), point out that when the tasks are not well-defined coordination issues may occur, which evidences Tshoki and Karma's concern with equal task division and participation. This lack of organization leads to a stressful environment. When the responsibilities are not clear among members, some members may take over the discussions, leaving very less opportunities for the quieter ones. Sometimes when the members do not know what is expected from them leads to overlaps in efforts and leads to poor time management where they may spend too much time on certain activities and not everyone will get enough time to share their ideas ultimately this hinders group progress. Kuenzang's and Phuntsho concerns about unequal participation align with Hadwin et al. (2018) that the dominant members can overshadow quieter members and limit their speaking practice and meaningful contribution. This imbalance was realized during group presentations where two group members did most of the talking while the rest offered little information. When members do not have equal rights to the floor to express themselves in equal measure, then group members will have missed chances to improve their communication skills.

Social Conflict and its Effects on Group Participation

Trust is one of the significant factors that contribute to making collaborative learning successful. However, it can be challenging when group members do not trust one another. When there is a lack of trust then it limits the sharing of ideas, and students may feel less engaged in the activities. They may hold back their ideas and be hesitant to contribute. Similarly, a lack of trust leads to a social conflict where the students stick to their opinions and ideas as they may not trust the other members' perspectives which makes them less engaged in the activity, hampering

the overall speaking skills. Thinley's impersonal relationships and trust problems align with Toiviainen (2003) who noted that trust is essential when working together. If the members of the group are not able to build trust and confidence with one another then the communication may not take place. Dorji's point on social conflict aligns with According to Lee et. al. (2015), peer collaboration might result in social problems that impede students' learning and task completion. Students experience social conflict when they cannot reach an agreement because of their egos sticking to their own opinions which reduces active participation. In all, the participants' experiences reveal that as much as group learning has effectiveness in enhancing student understanding of course content, such issues should be well managed to enhance the effectiveness of group learning activities.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I will provide an overview of my thesis study, and summarize the key findings regarding my two research questions.

Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

The research findings examined the impact of collaborative learning on the development of speaking among EFL learners in Bhutan. Most of the participants showed notable improvements in speaking fluency, confidence, and ability to engage in English conversation. Speaking practice was incorporated in activities such as discussions, presentations, and role-plays regularly in collaborative learning setups and this improved fluency as evidenced by the majority of the participants. Since the interaction had been very friendly and supportive most of the students felt relaxed and they were more willing to contribute to the class discourse which in turn enhanced their speaking and confidence. Moreover, pronunciation, vocabulary, and overall speaking fluency were significantly improved through constructive feedback from peers.

Another important finding was that collaborative learning fostered motivation and participation. Several participants pointed out that learning in groups was more engaging and fun as compared to conventional learning. Moreover, learners were more willing to engage and hence improved learning. Students' language use was further expanded by the diversity of perspectives in the groups since they were exposed to a wider range of idioms and speaking styles. However, there were a few concerns that were raised including the challenges of collaborative learning such as coordination problems and imbalance in participation within groups which had a negative impact on collaborative learning. These results imply that even though collaborative learning greatly improves speaking abilities, structured strategies to address

potential problems and also integrating the strengths of both approaches will help in achieving greater learning.

Recommendations

Based on the findings I would recommend the following recommendations to maximize the benefits of collaborative learning.

Structured Collaborative Learning from Early Stages

Early adoption of collaborative learning foster essential communication and team work skills among students, helping in building confidence. By introducing collaborative learning from an early age can help break the cultural conventions of silence or passive involvement. Moreover, to maximize the effectiveness of collaborative learning, the curriculum should incorporate a mix of individual and group assignments so that students can be held accountable for their learning.

Defined Roles and Clear Instructions

Division of roles to individuals within the groups is an effective practice to enhance students' interest and ensure balanced engagement. Clearly specified roles help students in understanding what is expected of them during the task which also makes them more focused on their responsibilities. By assigning specific roles to all members of the group, instructors should ensure that each student gets a chance to be an active participant and to make their input into the task. The roles should be assigned concerning students' learning strengths, weaknesses, and interests which will maximize their contributions and develop learning. In addition, encourage students to rotate roles during different collaborative tasks, this opportunity will help them to be responsible and contribute effectively to the group. This prevents a common problem, whereby some of the students make minimal contributions to the processes or to the passive participants.

Balanced Individual and Group Learning

Though collaborative learning is important, it is important to maintain a balance between individual and group work. It may also be observed that some students prefer to work in solitude regarding some assignments and ideals, a hybrid learning model can meet a variety of learning styles. Hence, a curriculum should alternate individual tasks that involve the students in some independent tasks leading to personal exploration and group assignments that foster teamwork and communication.

Balanced Assessment Methods

Collaborative learning creates challenges in grading, as traditional evaluations may not fully capture the nuances of group-based learning. To address this, a balanced assessment strategy should be implemented.

To address this, a balanced assessment strategy should be implemented:

Individual Accountability in Group Work

In group projects, it is usually the whole group that is given a particular grade, however, contributions of individuals should be evaluated. This can be done through peer assessments in which the students rate the work of their fellows.

Areas for further research

I researched a very important and timely topic the findings of which I believe will add value to the existing literature and benefit teachers, students, course designers and administrators. There is a wide scope for future research on related areas to my study. I would like to discuss these here.

Long-Term Impacts of Collaborative Learning on Speaking Skills

Studies also show that collaborative learning leads to enhanced speaking skills in the short term. However, more research is required in the long term. It is possible to follow the learners for several months or years to know if the fluency, confidence, and overall language proficiency learned in the collaborative learning environment remain the same or improved after they have left the environment. This leads to the question, “Does continued participation in collaborative activities result in Mastery of the Language, or will performance have a plateau?” These areas could also be examined in this research to show whether engagement in the specific domain of speaking over the long term enhances other domains in language use such as listening, reading, or writing. Thus, identifying these long-term effects might help educators to make conclusions regarding the further applicability of collaborative learning as a teaching approach.

Impacts of Collaborative Learning on Different Learning Contexts

Collaborative learning occurs in various contexts including learning institutions such as classrooms in urban schools to rural, under-resourced environments. Hence a need for studying how collaborative learning exhibits different results in these different contexts, especially for ESL learners. For instance, in which way does culture affect group behavior, and do students who studied in different schools exchange ideas in the same manner? Further, research can review if the advantage of collaborative learning applies in an online or hybrid learning environment which is increasingly common today. The evaluation of the Collaborative Learning environment’s effectiveness based on context will facilitate educators to implement the necessary modifications for learner populations more effectively.

Limitations

Now I would like to acknowledge the limitations of my study. The results of the study could be restricted due to the small sample size, which is composed of a particular subset of college-age Bhutanese students. This would not be applicable to everyone as my sample size is less in number so it cannot be generalized. This could limit how broadly the findings can be applied to larger populations or other educational settings in Bhutan or other nations.

Depending on the way different instructors use collaborative learning methodologies, their efficacy can fluctuate greatly. Inconsistencies in the study's findings could result from variations in teaching methods, classroom dynamics, and student interactions.

Concluding Comments

In the 21st century, effective speaking skills are considered to be crucial and more than ever before. It has been seen that people of the world live in synergistic environments and need to communicate globally for better results. Speaking skills allow one to express their ideas coherently, converse effectively, and express ideas convincingly. All these skills are very essential in doing well in school, in employment opportunities, and in relating to other people. In general, the Bhutanese people are considered introverted and reserved. This particular cultural practice may pose a problem to students particularly when it comes to practicing their speaking skills. Collaborative learning is a well-ordered system that benefits learners by helping them to be more open and participate in class activities, even the quietest ones. Ideally, the schools promote a desirable organizational culture that would allow learners to break the conventional shyness and practice their speaking skills. Therefore, by implementing collaborative learning strategies, schools in Bhutan will enable the student to have better speaking skills, improve their learning experience, and shape their future. The positive outcomes seen at the university level

give reasons to support the need for the implementation of these practices at the school level, hence providing positive effects on all students who will benefit from this learning area.

The study proves that collaborative learning is an effective method of developing speaking skills for EFL learners in Bhutan. It provides a safe space for students to practice speaking, get feedback, and have meaningful conversations, all of which help them become more confident and fluent speakers. The results demonstrate the potential of collaborative learning to overcome the drawbacks of traditional instructional methods, especially concerning improving students' communication skills. However, the study also shows that future studies in the area of collaborative learning should also focus on solving the problems associated with coordination and participation in group activities to achieve the maximum benefits of group learning. However, structured approaches and group learning right from the start could assist schools in Bhutan to develop speaking skills for students which will be advantageous for their educational and career life.

Through the study of the perspectives of students, this research found valuable insights into the impact of collaborative learning on the development of speaking skills among EFL learners of Bhutan. The results of the study highlight the positive outcomes of collaborative learning in the development of speaking skills. This is particularly the case at the university level where group learning is particularly promoted and students have pointed out improvements in their speaking skills. Based on these positive outcomes, the use of collaborative learning initiatives in schools of Bhutan should therefore be encouraged or practiced. Starting the use of collaborative learning from an early stage will enable students to acquire good speaking skills right from this level hence performing well in other academic and professional events later in

their lives. Though collaborative learning has advantages, some challenges need to be addressed so that collaborative learning can be effective.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Consent Form

Title of the research Study: Investigating the Impacts of Collaborative Learning on the Development of Speaking Skills among EFL Learners in Bhutan

Researcher: Aruna Homagai, Department of English and Humanities (ENH), Brac University

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Purpose of the research:

This study aims to explore how collaborative learning impacts the development of speaking skills among EFL learners in Bhutan. It seeks to support the successful integration of collaborative learning in language classrooms and make a lasting contribution to the ongoing advancement of spoken English in Bhutan. Therefore, it will be beneficial for both educators and college students to improve their speaking skills.

Procedure:

If you agree to participate, the interview will take approximately 40 to 50 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded for accuracy and information will be used solely for research purposes and the information will be kept confidential. I will be using pseudonyms instead of real names. You can withdraw anytime from the interview.

Consent statement:

I have read and understood the information provided above. I agree to participate in this interview voluntarily and understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

Participant Name:

Participant Signatures:

Date:

Researcher's Signature:

Date:

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

1. Could you please introduce yourself briefly?
2. What kind of fluency do you have in four skills in English?
3. How do you feel about participating in collaborative learning activities compared to traditional learning methods?
4. How often do you take part in collaborative learning activities in your English class?
5. Do you feel working in a group rather than individually has helped to improve your English speaking skills? If so, how?
6. How has collaborative learning helped you improve your confidence and fluency in your speaking?
7. What do you find most beneficial about learning in groups compared to individually?
8. How motivated do you feel to participate in group activities compared to individual tasks?
9. Do you feel more engaged during collaborative learning sessions? Why or why not?
10. What challenges do you face when participating in group activities such as group discussions, group projects, and presentations?
11. Can you describe any changes in your confidence level when speaking English after participating in group activities?
12. What suggestions do you have for improving collaborative learning activities to develop the speaking skills of Bhutanese students?

Appendix 3: Sample Transcript and Coding

Participant Karma

DU	Participants	Questions and Answers	Codes/Themes
1	I	Hello, its great to have you. Could you introduce yourself briefly?	
2	Karma	Umm I am A. Currently an undergraduate student of X college in Bhutan. Umm I am in last year of my college.	
3	I	Thank you. Moving on to the questions. what kind of fluency do you have in your four skills in English?	
4	Karma	Uhh I would describe my English fluency as moderate. Like I can read and write effectively, and I understand spoken English umm fairly well. Actually, my speaking skills were less fluent, but i can say as intermediate.	Moderate, read and write effectively, complex vocabulary
5	I	On the related note how do you feel about participating in collaborative learning activities compared to traditional learning methods?	
6	Karma	Umm I feel traditional teaching-learning principles prevalent in Bhutan have been characterized mainly as “ transmission or knowledge by lectures”. this environment, those in the class are required to listen to the teachers or facilitators, take down notes and passively soak in knowledge without being very much involved in the process. It mostly involves a lot of reading, writing, and memorization as	Engaging, personal growth, improving fluency, problem solving, sharing ideas

		<p>well as little or no encouragement of oral communication, or participation in discussions. We are graded based on writing ability and it is a central feature. Based on their written assignments and exams, placing less emphasis on speaking.</p> <p>If i share my experience of “introvert” to an extrovert.I was an introverted student who rarely spoke to anyone in the school and also I never felt there was a need to speak as it was traditional learning. It was a passive process where the majority of the time we simply listened and did not have to contribute. Later when I joined college I found personal growth and positive changes myself. From my experience I feel collaborative learning brings out an activity-based concept that entails a lot of interaction between the students thereby improving the fluency of the speech. Moreover, in this method, students are grouped and assigned tasks that involve discussing issues, solving problems, and sharing ideas. By engaging in such tasks as roleplays, presentations, and group discussions, I can interact freely with the group hence providing a good platform for voice dialect practice.</p>	
7	I	Following up on that, how often do you take part in collaborative learning activities in your English class?	
8	Karma	Umm I take part in collaborative learning activities most of the time in my English class. In college, our instructor most of the time I mean	Frequently, group discussions, projects

		frequently organizes group discussions, umm projects, and uhh interactive sessions to enhance our learning experience. Actually, this consistent participation has greatly contributed to my language development.	
9	I	That brings me to next question do you feel working in a group rather than individually has helped to improve your English speaking skills? if so, how?	
10	Karma	Yes, Yes, working in a group has significantly improved my English speaking skills. Like during school days I didn't have such opportunities to work in a group. It was always working alone. I have come to realized that the the frequent interaction and umm communication with peers provides enough practice. Like it encourages me to express my thoughts clearly and confidently. To add on this, receiving feedback from the group members helped me identify and work on my weaknesses.	Improved, encouraged, interaction, communication, confidently, clearly
11	I	Thank you for that, moving on to that next question how has collaborative learning helped you improve your confidence and fluency in your speaking?	
12	Karma	Collaborative learning has greatly help Speaking with peers is a crucial part of improving speaking abilities, and collaborative learning offers many opportunities to do so. There is less pressure in groups as everyone in the	Less pressure Group discussions Anxiety levels

		<p>group is learning and I did not feel judged as much as I expected in the beginning as I had a bad experience during my school days. The more I participated in group discussions and debates I found out that my anxiety levels were decreasing and I was speaking fluently. In the initial stages, I was not very fluent in speaking but then slowly and gradually I gained the confidence to speak without having the break every few seconds to look for the words. In the beginning, I was not so comfortable speaking, but as we carry on speaking with the group members, I can now speak for as long as 5 minutes without stumbling.</p>	
13	I	<p>Could you add more to it like how has collaborative learning helped to overcome fears, and improve your speaking skills, especially in terms of vocabulary?</p>	
14	Karma	<p>Sure, sure, to mention one of my biggest fear was making mistake and being judged by others due to which I did not prefer to speak up but after being part of collaborative learning umm where I got to hear different viewpoints ideas and language style as students come from different background so I feel this exposure has helped to expand my vocabulary and like it also improved my ability to use a wide range of words and I feel it has led to a better fluency.</p>	<p>Fear of maing mistake, exposure to different view points, expand vocabulary, wide range of words.</p>
15	I	<p>What do you find most beneficial</p>	

		about learning in groups compared to individually?	
16	Karma	Umm like as I started being part of group or peers activities I realised difference in myself so I feel Learning in groups has been incredibly beneficial because it allows me to share ideas and learn from others. This exchanged of knowledge has deepened my understanding of the subject. The social aspect of group learning also boosted my motivation and makes the process more enjoyable and less stressful.	Share ideas, learn from others, deepened understanding, less stressful
17	I	Moving to next question.. How motivated do you feel to participate in group activities compared to individual task?	
18	Karma	Well, umm I feel more motivated to Group activities made learning more dynamic and enjoyable than doing alone”. Activities sometimes included rewards and praises which made the learning process enjoyable which motivated me to interact and engage in the activities, imporving my speaking skills.	More motivated Awards, praises
19	I	Next, I would like to ask do you feel more engaged during collaborative learning sessions? Why or why not?	

20	Karma	Yes yes, I feel more engaged during collaborative learning sessions. The interactive environment where we get opportunities to share thoughts and ideas encourages active participation and discussion, which makes learning more stimulating. And also the rewards and Praises kept me enaged and motivated to put in efforts.	More engaged, interactive environment, active participation, sharing ideas,
21	I	Thats great, my next question is what challenges do you face when participating in group activities such as group discussions, projects and presentations?	
22	Karmna	Umm , some challenges I face in group activities include There have been coordination issues such as dividing tasks among members and ensuring everyone contributes equally. I have experience in an unorganized group setting the less confident and the introvert students often don't get a chance to speak, leading to a missed opportunity to improve their speaking skills. Moreover, it creates a stressful environment that inhabits speaking.	Coordination issues, Unequal participation, misscommuni cation, differing level of commitment
23	I	Thats really helpful. Lets move on to can you describe any changes in your confidence level when speaking english after participating in group activities?	
24	Karma	Umm, as far my experience participating in group activities has significantly boosted my confidence in speaking English. Like the the regular practice and supportive environment	boosted Confidence reduced anxiety, improved fluency, comfortable using language.

		<p>have reduced my anxiety and improved my fluency. Also uhh interacting with others in a group setting has made speaking up and umm sharing ideas easier, making me much more comfortable using the language. Like I already shared that during school days I did not get such opportunity which is why I did not had much confidence in speaking but after joining college I have found changes in myself. I am at the stage where I do not have to think before responding anyone of what am I going to say next.</p>	
25	I	<p>As a final question, what suggestions do you have for improving collaborative learning activities to develop the speaking skills of students?</p>	
26	Karma	<p>Umm, here are five suggestions for improving collaborative learning activities to develop students' speaking skills: I suggest incorporating more structured small group discussions and interactive role-playing exercises to uhh improve collaborative learning activities as they get opportunities to share ideas, thoughts for developing speaking skills. secondly, peer feedback sessions which can provide valuable insights as they receive immediate feedback on their activity or performnce so it would help them to understand where they are wrong or areas needing improvement. Umm, it also exposes different viewpoints. Also lastlyI feel</p>	<p>Structured small group discussions, interactive role-playing, Interactive games, and peer feedback.</p>

		<p>incorporating engaging interactive games and providing opportunities for presentations and debates can also significantly enhance speaking skills.</p>	
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