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# Effectiveness of Student Team Roles and Teamwork in an EFL Communicative Classroom

## Eficacia de los Roles de Equipo de los Estudiantes y del Trabajo en Equipo en un Aula Comunicativa de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

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### ABSTRACT

This exploratory action-research study examined undergraduate students' perceptions of teamwork and the rotation of team roles in EFL communicative classes, while also assessing a concise action plan aimed at enhancing group cohesion. A mixed-methods approach was employed, comprising two term-based surveys (Term 1  $n = 67$ ; Term 2  $n = 47$ ) that provided descriptive data on perceptions of teamwork and role rotation, alongside semi-structured interviews that elucidated operational dynamics and obstacles encountered. The results showed that most participants had positive opinions about role rotation and collaborative learning. The most positive views went up a little bit after being around them for a longer time. However, there were still problems with uneven participation and language skills that made it hard for everyone to take part fairly. Interview data indicated that brief, non-academic bonding sessions enhanced rapport; nonetheless, they were inadequate to eradicate freeloading or accountability concerns without more defined role structures, supervision, and sustained group continuity. The outcomes are examined through the lenses of collaborative-learning theory and Team Role Theory. Practical suggestions emphasize the necessity for explicit role delineations, linguistic scaffolding, peer evaluation, contribution documentation, and enduring groups to facilitate inclusive teamwork centered on skill development.

**Keywords:** collaborative learning, team roles, EFL classroom, exploratory action research, student accountability, language scaffolding

### RESUMEN

Este estudio exploratorio de investigación-acción examinó las percepciones de los estudiantes universitarios sobre el trabajo en equipo y la rotación de roles en equipos en clases comunicativas de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL), al tiempo que evaluó un plan de acción conciso destinado a mejorar la cohesión grupal. Se empleó un enfoque de métodos mixtos, que comprendía dos encuestas basadas en semestres (semestre 1  $n = 67$ ; semestre 2  $n = 47$ ) que proporcionaron datos descriptivos sobre las percepciones del trabajo en equipo y la rotación de roles, junto con entrevistas semiestructuradas que dilucidaron las dinámicas operativas y los obstáculos encontrados. Los resultados mostraron que la mayoría de los participantes tenían opiniones positivas sobre la rotación de roles y el aprendizaje colaborativo. Las opiniones más positivas aumentaron ligeramente después de pasar más tiempo entre ellos. Sin embargo, persistieron los problemas de participación desigual y habilidades lingüísticas que dificultaban la participación justa de todos. Los datos de las entrevistas indicaron que las breves sesiones de vinculación no académicas mejoraron la relación; no obstante, fueron insuficientes para erradicar el parasitismo o las preocupaciones sobre la responsabilidad sin estructuras de roles más definidas, supervisión y continuidad grupal sostenida. Los resultados se examinan a través del lente de la teoría del aprendizaje colaborativo y la teoría de los roles de equipo. Las sugerencias prácticas enfatizan la necesidad de una delimitación explícita de roles, andamiaje lingüístico, evaluación por pares, documentación de contribuciones y grupos duraderos para facilitar el trabajo en equipo inclusivo centrado en el desarrollo de habilidades.

**Palabras clave:** aprendizaje colaborativo, roles de equipo, aula de inglés como lengua extranjera, investigación-acción exploratoria, responsabilidad estudiantil, andamiaje lingüístico

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## Introduction

Currently, part of our responsibilities as teachers and professors is to prepare our students to succeed in college life, the workforce, and their adult lives. For that purpose, teaching 21st-century skills has become necessary. Those skills refer to what students need to know and what life and career skills they must develop. Voogt and Pareja (2010) mention some of these skills to be critical thinking, communication skills, creativity, problem-solving, perseverance, collaboration, information literacy, technology skills and digital literacy, media literacy, global awareness, self-direction, social skills, literacy skills, civic literacy, social responsibility, innovation skills, and thinking skills. Several of these skills can be taught in a Collaborative Learning (CL) environment where students work in teams and adopt roles that will improve the learning-teaching experience's efficiency, motivating students to be more engaged in their learning. At the same time, they develop communication, creativity, critical thinking, social responsibility, and other relevant skills.

One main concern for English Language Teachers (ELT) has been how to help future professionals develop learning skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, which are essential for their professional careers. Therefore, it has become vital to analyze some teaching strategies and their results regarding whether they help students develop and improve their communication and collaboration skills in the target language. One of these strategies is teamwork within a collaborative environment, where students develop various activities and produce different tangible products and theoretical conclusions. Students are assigned different roles to ensure the group's productivity, increase the efficiency of this type of CL, and develop community and social responsibility. There are different roles that students can adopt; however, in this study, the focus was only on four of them: *editor-in-chief*, *time master*, *note taker*, and *transcriber*. The primary purpose of this research project was to learn the perspectives of the students regarding these roles (PD Center, n.d.) and how effective they thought they were at the moment of learning and assessing their performance in classes, as well as developing improvements to the strategy. Consequently, the research question was: Do working in teams and performing different team roles enhance or hinder students' learning?

## Theoretical background

Namaziandost et al. (2019) refer to cooperative learning as an instructional method that could increase students' motivation. This method can be developed as group work "in order to maximize one another's learning and to achieve certain goals" (Namaziandost et al., 2019, p. 86). Group work allows students to take advantage of the tasks, practicing all skills (listening, reading, writing, grammar, and speaking), making the learning experience student-centered. From that perspective, CL transforms learning into engaging social and contextual experiences that lead to a deeper understanding of the knowledge that students need to acquire.

Through group work, students can create appropriate bonds during the course, developing a sense of "respect" and "belonging" (Pham, 2017, p. 20). Furthermore, through cooperative learning, students may feel "they are part of a wider community by helping each other" (Altun & Sabah, 2020, p. 156), which helps them develop social responsibility; in other words, they accept they cannot learn by themselves but in a community. In addition, students develop their language and communication skills, which is the main objective of learning a language. Assigning appropriate, rotative roles, which vary depending on the number of team members, should reinforce these favorable effects (OnTESOL, 2022). Then, teachers should define each role's tasks, assigning appropriate names such as facilitator, timekeeper, notetaker, and the like (Center for Teaching Excellence, 2015).

Since working in groups may not be a common practice, when students face this new experience, they may find that it can enhance or hinder their experience. In their study, Chen (2018) found that students appreciate being able to solve problems as a group, giving and receiving feedback, and finding peer reviewing quite effective. This author also points out that teachers can benefit from their students' collaboration because "they have more chances to understand students' needs and know how to assist their students' learning" (Chen, 2018, p. 4). Additionally, students learn to communicate effectively while developing their critical thinking skills and get better prepared for their professional lives (Cornell University, n.d.).

## **Cooperative Learning vs. Collaborative Learning**

Kato et al. (2015) highlight key differences between cooperative and CL approaches. Cooperative learning focuses on traditional knowledge, with the instructor retaining authority over the task. In contrast, CL, tied to the social constructivist movement, transfers all authority to the group, emphasizing open-ended tasks and student empowerment. These differences underscore the contrasting approaches to authority, empowerment, and student involvement between cooperative and CL methodologies in the learning process.

## ***Collaborative Learning***

Laal and Ghodsi (2012) state that CL involves students and teachers working together in a joint intellectual effort, fostering an active and constructive process. It provides rich contexts for students to practice higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills. For these authors, CL is social, promoting intellectual synergy and better understanding. It encourages involvement in learning, cooperation, and civic responsibility. It encourages students to have an active voice in shaping their ideas and values, aligning to foster civic responsibility. These characteristics distinguish CL from traditional teaching methods by emphasizing active participation, social interaction, and higher-order thinking skills.

Laal and Ghodsi (2012) emphasize the benefits of CL in education. CL fosters a supportive environment for conflict resolution, develops social skills, and encourages students to take responsibility for each other. It enhances oral communication skills, promotes more profound learning, and increases student engagement and maintenance. Additionally, CL promotes self-management skills, allowing students to learn effective time management and problem-solving techniques. Various CL activities can be implemented in the classroom, promoting collaboration, communication, and critical thinking skills. These activities include group projects, collaborative writing, problem-solving tasks, group discussions, study groups, and the jigsaw technique. Each activity encourages students to work together, which promotes camaraderie and teamwork in the classroom ("Benefits of collaborative learning," n.d.).

CL, as highlighted by Srinivas (n.d.), contributes significantly to student satisfaction by fostering a sense of belonging, community, and active engagement. Working together in groups provides students with opportunities to exchange ideas, discuss concepts, and solve problems collectively. The constructivist approach to education aligns well with CL, emphasizing active, experiential learning and knowledge construction through social interaction. This approach supports academic growth and enhances higher-level thinking skills crucial to the constructivist perspective (Srinivas, n.d.). The advantages of CL, as outlined by "Benefits of collaborative learning" (n.d.), extend across social, academic, and psychological domains. Socially, it enhances interpersonal relationships, improves communication skills, and supports diversity among students. Academically, it promotes problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and self-management. Psychologically, CL contributes to increased happiness, personal development,

and overall well-being. These benefits showcase the holistic impact of CL on students' academic, social, and psychological growth ("Benefits of collaborative learning," n.d.).

Laal and Ghodsi (2012) describe CL as a departure from traditional teaching methods, highlighting its active and constructive nature. It involves students actively integrating new information and creating new understanding, emphasizing higher-order reasoning and problem-solving skills. CL is inherently social, fostering intellectual synergy and mutual engagement in a common endeavor. In contrast, traditional teaching methods often involve independent student work, promoting tolerance, agreement, teamwork, community-building, and leadership skills. It is possible to enhance CL for English Language Learners (ELLs) by first emphasizing the development of effective group work norms, with teachers and students collaboratively establishing behaviors supportive of group learning. Second, CL provides language support for ELLs, ensuring their success in small group learning environments. By implementing these strategies, educators can cultivate a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment for all students (WIDA, 2014).

Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to construct norms for effective group interaction at the beginning of the school year. Classroom discussions facilitate the identification of behaviors that contribute to or detract from group learning experiences. Co-constructed understandings of seeking help, giving feedback, sharing responsibilities, setting goals, and settling disagreements are the building blocks of good group work norms. Teacher-led reflections, individual self-evaluations, and CL rubrics completed by students after each group work session can sustain and refine these norms (WIDA, 2014). To sustain and refine effective group work norms, teachers can employ various strategies throughout the school year. Regular classroom reflections, self-evaluations, and small group evaluations contribute to assessing progress and identifying areas for improvement. Teachers can use CL rubrics to provide constructive feedback and model effective group work behaviors, offering ongoing support and guidance. These strategies collectively aid in the development and maintenance of effective group work norms (WIDA, 2014). In other words, CL offers a multifaceted approach to education, enhancing student satisfaction, promoting holistic growth, and providing a dynamic and engaging learning environment. Implementing effective group work norms, incorporating various CL activities, and understanding the distinctions between cooperative and CL methodologies create an inclusive and supportive educational experience.

### ***Team Role Theory and Team Roles in English Language Teaching***

Team Role Theory (TRT) is a concept by Meredith Belbin that identifies nine roles individuals adopt within a team (Smith & Yates, 2011). It can help college students work together on school projects by giving them a way to understand and use each person's strengths in a group. Research suggests that knowledge of TRT can enhance the development of soft skills required for academic group work and industry. Prior knowledge of TRT magnifies the development of transferable skills, leading to more effective collaboration and improved group performance in academic settings. Developing softer transferable skills is maximized when individuals reflect on the reasons for engaging in group work. Educational and industrial settings also support group development through clear guidance, facilitation, and social testing.

Overall, TRT provides a framework for understanding individual roles within a team, promoting effective collaboration and the development of essential soft skills. The pilot study on Team Role Theory in Higher Education found that group work design and management significantly impact employability skills development. Knowledge of Team Role Theory (TRT) helps students develop transferable skills like communication, problem-solving, and

personal learning. Prior knowledge of TRT magnifies the development of softer transferable skills, contributing to improved group performance in academic settings. The research underscores the prospective advantages of integrating TRT into higher education (Smith & Yates, 2011).

Collaborative learning (CL) can help students do better in school, but it can be hard when they do not have the right tools (Washington University in St. Louis, 2022). Assigning specific roles within group work can create supportive structures, foster high-quality interactions, promote individual accountability, and enhance communicative skills. The Process Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning (POGIL) method is an example of a small group learning approach incorporating adaptable roles for different tasks. Effective facilitating involves transparency in role assignment, providing a list of roles, and encouraging students to develop roles based on critical tasks. Regular reinforcement and individual feedback on group dynamics are crucial for long-term assignments.

According to Herrmann (2021), team roles can be beneficial when used effectively, but when used poorly, they can lead to inequitable participation and engagement. Teachers can promote equitable collaboration by leveraging student roles, which include professional and field-specific roles, problem-exploring and problem-solving roles, and team management roles. Teachers and students should define their meanings and engage in authentic processes, practices, tools, and resources to make these roles authentic. Students can become more familiar with these roles by creating support and scaffolds, leading to more effective collaborative learning and equitable participation in intellectually rich work.

Drew (2023) points out that group roles are strategies that distribute tasks fairly and prevent duplication of work. They involve task allocation, specialization, efficiency, accountability, and transparency. Tasks are assigned based on each member's strengths and expertise, allowing them to focus on tasks that align with their skills. This ensures that each task is handled by the most suitable team member, reducing the likelihood of duplication. Clear roles also create accountability, reducing the chances of tasks being overlooked or incomplete. Transparency is maintained by clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of each member, preventing misunderstandings, and ensuring everyone understands their contributions to the group task. These strategies lead to more efficient and accountable teamwork.

Drew (2023) mentions, among others, the following group roles in student collaboration: 1) facilitator: manages group dynamics and ensures everyone's ideas are heard; 2) arbitrator: resolves conflicts within the group, listening to all sides and helping to reach a consensus; 3) monitor: keeps track of team items and ensures they are accounted for; 4) notetaker: takes minutes in meetings and shares them with the group; 5) timekeeper: ensures all tasks are timely and sets milestones for different tasks; 6) devil's advocate: identifies weaknesses in the project and ensures all possible outcomes and solutions are considered; 7) IT guru: ensures the group has the necessary equipment and software for the project; 8) reporter: gives the final presentation to the teacher or class, ensuring it is well-organized and engaging. These roles contribute to teamwork and collaboration by ensuring that each member has a specific responsibility and that everyone's contributions are valued.

Group roles are strategies that ensure accountability and efficiency in group tasks. They involve assigning clear responsibilities to each member, distributing tasks based on their strengths and expertise, allowing specialization, promoting efficient division of labor, establishing transparency and performance standards, and resolving conflicts. These strategies help prevent misunderstandings, ensure everyone understands their contributions, and foster accountability. By implementing these strategies, group roles can lead to a more organized and

productive collaborative effort, ensuring that each member's specific responsibilities and contributions are clearly defined (Drew, 2023).

## Methodology

The general objective of this study was to investigate the impact of assuming roles during collaborative teamwork on students' learning and class performance. The specific objectives included recognizing students' perspectives on teamwork and team roles, identifying potential obstacles to the learning process during classwork in teams, designing an action plan to enhance teamwork and team role efficiency based on student perspectives, implementing the action plan, and observing students' reactions and performance, and finally, comparing students' perspectives before and after the application of the action plan. These objectives collectively aimed to provide insights into collaborative learning dynamics, offering a comprehensive understanding of how role assumption influences students' experiences and outcomes in a classroom setting.

This project was performed under the principles of Exploratory Action Research (EAR) (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). EAR presents an appropriate opportunity for combining teaching practice and research to determine students' perceptions regarding learning in groups and adopting roles. EAR is a variation to Action Research (AR) to which an exploratory phase has been added (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). Its primary purpose is to encourage teachers to become researchers within their educational context and from a perspective that will not contradict their teaching responsibilities. However, it should also motivate them to research to satisfy their needs and expectations (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). In other words, EAR "is a way to explore, understand, and improve practices as teachers" (Shrestha et al., 2022, p. 408). EAR is not exempt from the rigors of academic research regarding the validity, credibility, relevance, and other factors that give quality to the inquiry process.

Another advantage of the EAR is making reflection the core of one's teaching practice and inquiry. Piggot-Irvine and Zornes (2016), when referring to the evaluation of AR, encourage researchers to constantly reflect on what moves them in their practice, their inquiry, and the content they work with and create. Furthermore, they should reflect on the process while performing it. In other words, they should steadily evaluate the inquiry and the teaching practice they are carrying out. Nonetheless, this reflection cannot only focus on the teaching practice and ways to improve it for the sake of the learners. It should also focus on how these practices fit within the school context and try to justify them (Newton & Burgess, 2008), spread them, and even problematize them, which could be the next cycle in the EAR process. In this sense, the EAR is the best option to be applied in classes and determine what students think of their classwork performance.

This research followed the procedures and principles of EAR (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018) in various cycles. EAR not only adapted effectively to the teaching practice but also enhanced the learning experience for students, as previous EAR in English Language Teaching (ELT) results have demonstrated. In other words, this research did not affect the normal development of classes but enhanced the experience for students, increasing their motivation, engagement, and interest in the subject and the linguistics field in general. It is also essential to consider that EAR is still new in Latin America's Linguistics and Research fields, except for Chile, where it has been successfully applied (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018). Other examples of EAR development can be found in India, Congo, Morocco, and the Philippines, where teachers developed EAR projects with the help of Hornby International and IATEFL. Therefore, this EAR project will advance the field for Bolivian English teachers and researchers.

## Type of Research

EAR is a variation of Action Research that includes an exploratory phase. Action research is mostly recognized as qualitative, with two main aims: helping teachers reflect on their practice (Burns, 2009) and as a professional development opportunity (West, 2011). Furthermore, EAR may motivate practitioners to become researchers (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018).

## Research Design

For this study, students from the Oral and Written Communication subjects, Terms 1 and 2, year 2023, were invited to be part of the research project voluntarily, and tools from qualitative and quantitative research were used. Following the EAR steps (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018), the research had seven stages:

- Plan to explore: A survey was used to identify students' attitudes towards teamwork and team roles within a collaborative learning environment to determine whether this strategy hindered or facilitated their learning.
- Explore: Semi-structured interviews were performed based on the survey to comprehend students' answers to the survey better.
- Analyze and reflect: The results of the survey and semi-structured interviews were analyzed and reflectively compared.
- Plan to change: An action plan was designed to increase the efficiency of the strategy. This plan consisted of providing quality time to the different groups to talk about personal things unrelated to the class or the subject's content, so their relationship could be enhanced.
- Act: The action plan was applied. The teacher-researcher took notes of the results of the students' performance.
- Observe: A second survey was applied to determine students' feelings regarding teamwork and team roles and their impact on their learning.
- Reflect: The results of the second survey were reflectively compared to the answers of the first one.

## Action Plan

Students were asked to work in groups of five or four members. Each student chose one role: editor-in-chief (in charge of making everyone participate), time manager (timekeeper), notetaker, and two typists (in charge of copying students' work to Google Drive). In each class, students had to assume a different role from the one they had before. After the exploration, groups were asked to spend time at the start of each class getting to know each other better. They were strongly encouraged to discuss anything they wanted, but not the class content.

## Data Sampling and Research Tools

The first exploratory survey was applied at the beginning of the first term of 2023. The survey was written in Spanish to avoid misunderstandings. Students from both Oral and Written Communication classes were asked to fill in the survey voluntarily; as a result, sixty-seven answers were collected. The survey first requested students to decide whether they

wanted to complete the form, and then there were three Likert scale questions, one yes-no question, and two checkbox questions with ten options each.

The first Likert scale question asked if students liked working in teams, going from “muchísimo” (a lot) to “para nada” (not at all). The second question asked whether students felt they learned more from working in teams than individually, varying the options from “definitivamente sí” (definitely yes) to “definitivamente no” (definitely no). The third Likert scale question was aimed at knowing whether students found teamwork useful, varying the scale from “muchísimo” (a lot) to “en absoluto” (not at all). The fourth survey question asked students to state whether they agreed on having different roles in each class by answering “sí” (yes) or no.

The last two questions contained checkboxes with ten options. Students were asked to choose three or more options. One question asked about the positive aspects of teamwork and having different roles in each class, while the other focused on the negative ones. The last option, in each case, asked students to provide their own ideas. The semi-structured interview included five prepared questions and three follow-up questions that emerged from the participants’ responses; the topics covered were getting to know their classmates, developing relationships, students’ levels of English, and team roles during teamwork. The second-term survey contained the same questions as the first one. This time, forty-seven responses were obtained from both Oral and Written Communication courses. The difference in the number of participants between the two surveys occurred because fewer students enrolled in the courses, which is a common situation during the second term of each academic year.

## Data Analysis

The analysis integrated descriptive statistics from two term-based surveys with thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews to evaluate students' perceptions of teamwork and the rotation of team roles, as well as the impact of a brief action plan. Survey responses are presented as raw counts and percentages; interview data were analyzed for recurring themes that elucidate and refine the quantitative trends. In cases where the original dataset failed to maintain the pairing of first- and second-term respondents, the two samples are regarded as independent for comparison.

### *Quantitative results and analysis*

Survey 1 (term 1, n = 67) and Survey 2 (term 2, n = 47) consistently indicate favorable attitudes towards teamwork and role rotation. In term 1, 11.9% of respondents chose the highest positive category for "liking teamwork," while the next two positive categories made up 41.8% and 32.8% of the total. Only 1.5% said they strongly disliked it. In term 2, a larger percentage (47.7%) selected the highest positive category, while the middle categories remained substantial. Students in both terms also said they learned more in groups than alone. There was a small increase in the highest response category in term 2. Agreement that rotating roles was useful remained high across terms, and a large majority accepted role rotation as appropriate (approximately 85% in both surveys). These descriptive findings suggest positive attitudes toward collaborative learning and role rotation in general. The rise in the most favorable response options between terms may be due to increased exposure to teamwork and role rotation over two terms; however, this change should be viewed with caution due to the lack of paired surveys and differing sample sizes.

### *Qualitative findings and interpretation*

The semi-structured interviews revealed four interrelated themes that illuminate the survey findings: social bonding and belonging, role clarity and accountability, uneven participation and discipline, and language-proficiency constraints. Students consistently reported that brief, non-academic “get-to-know-you” moments at the start of class lowered affective filters, increased willingness to speak, and made peer feedback feel less threatening. From this author’s perspective, these micro-interventions produced quick gains in rapport and risk-taking, but their effects were fragile: when groups were unstable or the bonding time was skipped, cohesion and mutual support declined rapidly.

Interviewees endorsed role rotation as a useful way to practice different skills, yet they repeatedly asked for clearer, operationalized role descriptions and teacher follow-up. Ambiguity about what each role entailed led to role drift, passive behavior, and missed responsibilities (for example, notes not uploaded or timekeeping ignored), which in turn eroded trust within teams. The author’s notes corroborated these accounts: groups that negotiated concrete task lists and used brief peer reminders distributed work more equitably, while those without explicit criteria tended toward freeloading and uneven workload distribution.

Differences in English proficiency emerged as a structural constraint that shaped who did the cognitively demanding or oral tasks, often concentrating learning opportunities in the hands of stronger speakers. Students framed this both as an efficiency strategy and as an equity problem, since lower-level peers were relegated to peripheral tasks and lost chances to develop oral skills. Interpreting these findings as an EFL teacher-researcher, it was concluded that brief bonding is necessary but insufficient; sustainable improvement requires three practical adjustments for the next cycle: explicit role rubrics with observable criteria, lightweight accountability mechanisms (peer ratings and contribution logs), and role-specific linguistic scaffolds so that rotation genuinely fosters learning for all proficiency levels.

### *Integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence*

Quantitative and qualitative strands converge: elevated levels of reported utility and favorable attitudes towards teamwork coexist with enduring apprehensions regarding unequal participation and disparities in language proficiency. The surveys show that most students enjoy working in groups and switching roles. The interviews explain why these positive feelings are mixed with real problems. For instance, the small rise in the highest positive response between terms fits with what students said: that being exposed to the method for longer made them feel more comfortable and willing to participate. Interviews also show why the short bonding activity at the start of class in the action plan did not completely solve the problem of unequal contribution. Students said that for bigger change, there needed to be **longer-term group continuity and clearer ways to hold people accountable.**

### **Discussion**

The study revealed generally favorable student attitudes towards collaborative learning and the rotation of team roles, although enduring practical challenges hindered the strategy’s complete efficacy. Quantitative trends indicated a heightened endorsement of teamwork and a slight enhancement in perceived learning from term 1 to term 2. Qualitative data elucidated these trends by highlighting the strengthening of social bonds over time and persistent challenges related to uneven participation and disparities in language proficiency. These

findings are consistent with the CL literature, which associates prolonged group interaction with enhanced engagement and advanced reasoning while also reflecting cautions that inadequate role execution compromises equitable participation (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012; Herrmann, 2021).

### **Social bonding and prolonged exposure**

Students said that spending a small amount of time in class talking about personal things that were not related to the lesson made groups more cohesive and comfortable. This pattern helps explain why the positive responses went up by term 2. The finding corroborates the constructivist framework for collaborative learning, which emphasizes social interaction as a means for knowledge construction and civic responsibility (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). It also fits with research that shows that when groups meet often and have time to create norms, collaborative routines make people feel like they belong and are more motivated (Pham, 2017; Srinivas, n.d.). The result means that short relational activities can help build trust in a group faster, but they probably will not lead to full behavioral change on their own unless the group stays together.

### **Role rotation, clarity, and accountability**

Students appreciated role rotation for enhancing skill practice, corroborating theoretical assertions that structured roles can facilitate participation and skill advancement (OnTESOL, 2022; Drew, 2023). Interviews, on the other hand, showed that role rotation only worked if there were clear definitions of roles, monitoring, and follow-up. These are all things that the POGIL and team-role literatures stress (Herrmann, 2021; Washington University in St. Louis, 2022). When roles were unclear or not well-defined, rotation led to either redundant efforts or a dispersal of responsibility. The study emphasizes that role assignments necessitate clear task descriptions, teacher support, and accountability measures to prevent unequal workloads.

### **Disparities in participation and limitations in language proficiency**

Uneven participation was the most common negative theme in both surveys and interviews. This was often because some members contributed less or had different levels of English proficiency. This fact confirms both empirical and theoretical cautions that collaborative frameworks may perpetuate inequality if not adequately supported (Herrmann, 2021). The language-proficiency constraint is particularly pertinent in EFL contexts: students with inferior proficiency may refrain from oral participation or assign speaking tasks to more proficient peers, thereby constraining practice opportunities and perpetuating asymmetries (WIDA, 2014; Namaziandost et al., 2019). The finding suggests that CL activities must intentionally integrate linguistic scaffolds—such as sentence frames, role-specific language supports, and differentiated tasks—to ensure inclusive participation.

### **What the short action plan did**

The short bonding activity at the beginning of class in the action plan led to some improvements, but they were not enough to solve problems with non-contribution or accountability. This outcome corresponds with the tenets of action research: brief interventions can modify attitudes and micro-practices; however, they typically require prolonged cycles, reinforcement, and structural supports to achieve sustainable behavioral change (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018; Piggot-Irvine & Zornes, 2016). In practice, the integration of relational time

with longitudinal group membership, well-defined role rubrics, peer assessment, and teacher-mediated checkpoints is more likely to yield sustainable enhancements.

## **Integration with Team Role Theory**

The study's method of assigning and rotating four classroom roles aligns with Team Role Theory's principal assertion that role-awareness can enhance individual strengths and facilitate group performance (Smith & Yates, 2011). Nonetheless, classroom implementation indicates that a restricted array of roles, absent explicit training in role enactment and reflection, may inadequately allocate responsibility or cultivate the soft transferable skills that TRT seeks to promote. Adding short role-training sessions, reflective debriefs, and role-alignment activities would make TRT's promise work better.

## **Conclusions**

Results indicate that students like collaborative learning with rotating roles and that it can make them more interested and feel like they are learning more when it is done with clarity, continuity, and linguistic scaffolding. Short relational interventions are beneficial, but they are not enough on their own. To make long-lasting changes, you need clear role scaffolding, systems of accountability, and long-term group structures. These conclusions are in line with important ideas in the fields of collaborative learning and team roles. They also give practical, context-sensitive advice for EFL classrooms that want to teach 21st-century skills through teamwork (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012; Drew, 2023; Voogt & Pareja, 2010).

## **Practical implications on EFL practice**

A clear set of team-role materials—written descriptions, short checklists, and short modeling demonstrations—helps make expectations clear and supports practiced enactment (OnTESOL, 2022; Center for Teaching Excellence, 2015). Peer evaluation systems, shared role logs in collaborative drives, and periodic teacher spot-checks enhance accountability and mitigate uneven contributions (Washington University in St. Louis, 2022). Language scaffolds, including sentence frames, rotational speaking prompts, and role-specific linguistic targets, facilitate meaningful participation and enhance confidence among learners with lower proficiency (WIDA, 2014; Namaziandost et al., 2019). Long-term group assignments help build norms, trust, and collaborative routines over time, which leads to deeper engagement and better teamwork (Pham, 2017; Srinivas, n.d.).

## **Limitations and implications for future research**

The study's dependence on independent, non-paired surveys and self-reports constrains causal inference regarding temporal change and introduces the potential for social-desirability bias; these limitations must be recognized in the reporting. Subsequent EAR cycles ought to acquire paired longitudinal data, incorporate objective participation metrics (such as peer evaluations and contribution logs), and either collect or account for language proficiency to elucidate its impact on participation and perceived learning. Adding a second coder to qualitative analysis and reporting inter-coder agreement would also make the results more credible (Piggot-Irvine & Zornes, 2016).

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