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Identifying English as a foreign language students' attitude to improving speaking skills through collaboration

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Speaking skills, being an essential part of effective communication, are significant for English as a foreign language (EFL) student in today's globalized world, and collaborative learning, being heterogeneous, assists them with more possibilities for enhancing and practicing the skills through a supportive environment, constructive feedback, and opportunities for real-world conversations. Therefore, this study aimed to identify EFL students' attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment. The researchers, to achieve the study objective, used the descriptive survey method to collect the data from a sample of 360 participants in the Preparatory Year (PY) at a Najran University. The study's instruments included a closed-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The results showed students having positive attitudes toward a collaborative learning environment can highly enhance their speaking skills. In addition, the respondents' study level did not impact their responses to enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment; however, male students showed higher attitudes than their female counterparts. Finally, the analysis of the interview showed that students' speaking skills can be improved in a collaborative learning environment in many ways including a supportive environment, interesting activities, and technology use. Based on the findings, the study recommends incorporating collaborative learning strategies to strengthen other language skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is frequently regarded as one of the most exciting skills in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, however, most students find it challenging to express themselves. Salih and Abdelameer [1] observed that a large percentage of Arab EFL students have trouble speaking English fluently. Researchers contend that attitudes, in terms of mastering a language, skill, or otherwise are a major factor, no matter whether they are positive or negative [2]–[4]. There are reasons to believe that attitudes can influence a person's determination, dedication, and effort-all of which are crucial learning elements. For example, Sawant and Rizvi [5] asserted that attitude can be described as a structured tendency to respond positively or negatively to a specific group of things. Similarly, Ellah and Achor [6] characterized attitude as a mental state of readiness that is developed through learning experiences and has a direct or dynamic influence on how individuals respond to everything. It is also believed that group or cooperative work can

transform an individual's attitude toward learning a particular skill in addition to improving performance and study habits.

Moreover, many scholars investigated EFL students' attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment. For instance, Normawati et al. [7] demonstrated that students had positive attitudes regarding using collaborative learning to learn English. Likewise, Soomro and Farooq [8] found that both male and female students face problems in developing effective speaking skills due to a lack of measures taken by teachers and students as well as by a restricted classroom environment. Besides, Belmekki and Baghzou [9] showed that the use of cooperative learning had a good impact on the students' attitudes, project outcomes, motivation, and use of the target language. Brown [10], also emphasizes that student attitudes have a positive impact on the extent of participation and communication during learning and teaching pursuits. This assertion implies that learners' attitudes are a key factor determining their involvement in language learning. In this regard, Zeinivand et al. [11] demonstrated that students' attitudes affect their learning outcomes in the form of enhanced speaking abilities. There is a widespread consensus among scholars that a collaborative learning environment strengthens situations where individuals work together to solve problems, develop effective communication, and provide numerous opportunities such as higher-level thinking, self-management, and oral communication skills. Kagan and Kagan [12] demonstrated that cooperative learning offered exceptional benefits for achieving a wide range of targeted educational goals. In addition, Al Jawad [13] suggested that cooperative learning was successful in enhancing students' speaking abilities. Likewise, Altun and Sabah [14] demonstrated that using cooperative strategies enabled the students to improve their speaking ability. Similarly, Atifnigar and Zaheer [15] revealed that cooperative learning has improved students' English language speaking abilities, understanding of the language, and most crucially, students' enthusiasm and encouragement, which has a major impact on English language proficiency. Additionally, Huang [16] discovered that using a smartphone-based collaborative project improved learners' speaking ability and engagement after an eight-week intervention. Furthermore, Harianingsih and Jusoh [17] suggested that collaborative learning in English classroom contexts improves students' language proficiency by providing more opportunities to use the language in authentic situations.

Despite empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of collaborative learning in the EFL context, there are still relatively few investigations that identify EFL students' attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment, particularly Najran University context. Such an investigation is significant in the Arab context especially in Najran University context considering the unique linguistic elements that influence the process of language learning. The current study aims to identify EFL students' attitudes toward enhancing their speaking skills in the collaborative learning environment. By undertaking this study, the researchers aim to enhance language education strategies tailored to the needs, perspectives, and preferences of EFL students, ultimately empowering them to speak confidently. Hence, it is hoped that this research will contribute to an encouraging learning experience through the study objectives: i) To identify the EFL students' attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment; ii) To find out any significant difference in participants' responses attributed to their gender and study level; and iii) To discover the better ways through which collaborative learning environment can enhance EFL students' speaking skills.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Collaborative learning also known as cooperative learning engages students working together in a small group to ensure participation and learning to happen. Many scholars characterized cooperative learning as a collaboration between academic stakeholders which in turn assists students learn from each other and developing their skills and competencies as well as dynamic and active learning [18]–[20]. The importance of collaborative learning is undeniable, and the available literature indicates that the study of collaborative learning began in the 1960s [21] and emerged as an area of research in the 1970s. During this period, many teachers and educators used small-group teaching strategies without being aware of or using the term collaborative learning [22]. Collaborative learning has its origins in Vygotsky's [23] social development theory and zone of proximal development, which emphasizes the value of social contact and communication in learning. According to this theory, relationship among individuals fosters language development, and interaction and cooperation are key components of learning [24]. The concept, while encouraging interaction, further emphasizes that the students should be guided by descriptions, presentations, and prospects for cooperative learning [25]. The study's theoretical framework coincides with collaborative learning and social development theory as well as the scholars who believe that cooperative learning improves language learning ability, motivation, responsibility, and respect for others' opinions. Numerous educators contend that students can get the social support they require while learning through collaborative learning. For example, Woolfolk [25] argues that interaction and cooperation with more experienced language learners help language learners improve their language ability. Likewise, Roseth et al. [26] assert that cooperative group work enhances

learning outcomes and performance. In addition, Alghamdy [27] argues that cooperative learning enhances students' English proficiency, motivation, responsibility, sharing, and respect for others' viewpoints, as well as fosters positive relationships among classmates. Furthermore, the concept of cooperative learning is described by Nasser [28], as a collaborative effort between students and teachers in which teachers support the development of students' skills and competencies as a result of dynamic and active learning. Similarly, Spence [29] considers collaboration in the English language classroom can significantly increase learning and therefore, collaborative learning is one of the effective classroom tools that can be used in various forms such as project task, classroom game activities, and team building exercises. He further adds that students are more successful and productive when they work together in any English language learning activity. Furthermore, Altun and Sabah [14] argue that cooperative learning groups are important ways in teaching the English language where teacher can promote interaction in the classroom for the students' benefit. They add, involving the students in cooperative group tasks enhances their communicative ability, makes them capable of sending and receiving information in English, develops cooperative understanding and visions, and advances communication skills in socially appropriate way. Numerous educational advantages can be completed through cooperative learning including more opportunities for practice, an encouraging environment, possibilities for feedback, and real-world communication. Ho [30] views collaborative learning environment in which students benefit from one another. Gerlach [31] observes that collaborative learning ensures that learning occurs as a result of social interaction. It is important to highlight the students who have positive attitudes are more likely to collaborate with their peers and engage in collaborative learning; they are also more likely to be receptive to exchanging ideas and working toward a common objective. Recognizing the significance of developing EFL students' speaking skills, educators and researchers have turned their attention to innovative pedagogical approaches, with a particular focus on collaborative learning environments. This study to bridge the gap will try to answer the following research questions: i) What are the EFL students' attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment?; ii) Do participants' responses differ in terms of gender and study level?; and iii) What are the better ways through which collaborative learning environment can enhance EFL students' speaking skills?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

The study's objective is to determine the attitudes of EFL students toward improving their speaking skills in a collaborative learning setting. To accomplish this, the researchers utilized a descriptive survey approach. They gathered data through a closed-item questionnaire and conducted semi-structured interviews to address the research questions.

3.2. Population and sample of the study

The study was conducted among students (N=1200) enrolled in the Preparatory Year (PY) program at Najran University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia during the third semester of the 2023 academic year. The sample comprised 360 students (30%), all of whom were Saudi nationals pursuing degrees in medicine, engineering, or computer science and seeking a PY certificate. Their ages ranged from 16-22 years. These students had completed their secondary education and met the admission criteria for Najran University. Both male and female students were included in the study population. The research received approval from the Ethics Committee at the Deanship of Scientific Research at Najran University under the code (010493-023026-DS), and signed consent forms were obtained from all participants. Students were invited to participate voluntarily in the study through a questionnaire, with the understanding that they could withdraw or decline to answer any questions at any time. They were also informed that participation would not result in any direct or indirect benefits. Participants were assured that all information provided for the study would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. They were encouraged to contact the researchers with any questions or for further clarification. The study sample was selected using stratified sampling based on gender and study level. Table 1 presents the distribution of the study sample.

3.3. Study tools

A questionnaire about students' attitudes toward enhancing EFL speaking skills in collaborative learning was developed from previous studies [32]–[34], [8]. The link to the questionnaire was shared with the study population via teachers, Blackboard, and WhatsApp groups. The first section of the questionnaire was about participants' demographic information. The second part consisted of (12) items distributed into three domains: teamwork (4 items), peer-to-peer learning (4 items), and social intelligence (4 items). The selection of the questionnaire for data collection is in line with Creswell [35], who suggests that surveys are valuable for identifying important beliefs and attitudes of individuals (p. 06). The questionnaire employed a

Likert-scale with five responses: never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), and always (5). On average, participants took about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was conducted to gather teachers' perspectives on the most effective methods for enhancing EFL students' speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment. These interviews were conducted by one of the researchers and lasted approximately 5-10 minutes per participant. The semi-structured interview question (what are the better ways through which collaborative learning environment can enhance EFL students' speaking skills?) followed prompts such as groups, practice and environment, student level, encouragement and motivation, and organized conversation.

Table 1. Distribution of the study sample

Variable	Category	No	%
Study level	Level 1	92	25.6
	Level 2	119	33.1
	Level 3	149	41.4
Gender	Male	210	58.3
	Female	150	41.7
Total		360	100

3.4. Validity
The study tools were checked by a jury of experts (no=8). The experts are faculty members in English language teaching. They were asked to verify whether the tools could collect data to achieve the study objectives. Also, they maintained the wordiness of items and language. Based on their views, the following issues were addressed:

3.4.1. Questionnaire
From:

Teamwork
−   I like speaking in a group.
−   I think that teamwork enhances speaking productivity.

Peer-to-peer learning
−   I listen to my classmates with attention.

Social intelligence
−   I like participating in the tasks with my peers.
−   I never hesitate to ask questions.

To:

Teamwork
−   I prefer speaking in a group environment rather than alone.
−   I find that teamwork assists in enhancing speaking productivity.

Peer-to-peer learning
−   I listen to my classmates with attention during speaking tasks.

Social intelligence
−   I enjoy participating in the tasks with my peers while speaking.
−   I do not hesitate to ask questions of my classmates during speaking tasks.

Interview question
From:
−   How can students enhance their speaking skills?
To:
−   What are the better ways through which a collaborative learning environment can enhance EFL students' speaking skills?

The questionnaire underwent a pilot test with a sample of 20 students who were not part of the main study sample. This pilot aimed to calculate the questionnaire's internal consistency by examining Pearson correlation coefficients between the items, their respective domains, and the overall scale. Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between the items of the domains related to EFL students' attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment and their total domain scores. These correlations were found to be statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The Pearson correlation coefficients between the items and their respective domain's total score ranged from 0.591** to 0.854**. Additionally, the correlation coefficients between the domains and the total score of the tool ranged from 0.804** to 0.920** and were significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 2. Internal consistency of the questionnaire (attitudes toward collaborative learning)

Domains-Items	Correlation Coefficient with Domain	Correlation Coefficient with Scale
Teamwork	1	.804**
1	.723**	.703**
2	.781**	.553*
3	.591**	.781**
4	.664**	.679**
Peer-to-Peer Learning	1	.814**
1	.658**	.662**
2	.645**	.765**
3	.648**	.789**
4	.766**	.814**
Social Intelligence	1	.920**
1	.800**	.765**
2	.814**	.820**
3	.854**	.824**
4	.824**	.843**

**Significant at (0.01)

3.5. Reliability

The reliability of the domains was assessed using both Cronbach's alpha and split-half methods. The study tool was administered to a survey sample of 20 students. Table 3 indicates that the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.91, while the split-half reliability coefficient was 0.88. These coefficients are considered high, indicating the appropriate reliability of the study tool.

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients for EFL students' attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a cooperative learning environment

No	Domain	Cronbach's Alpha	Split-Half Guttman
1	Teamwork	0.83	0.82
2	Peer-to-Peer Learning	0.80	0.79
3	Social Intelligence	0.82	0.80
	Total	0.91	0.88

3.6. Statistical processing

The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS), version (23) was adopted in analyzing the study results and answering its questions. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to check the validity of consistency. Cronbach's alpha was used to check the reliability of the study tool. Means, standard deviations, and ranks were computed to answer the first question, "What are the attitudes of EFL students towards enhancing conversational skills in a cooperative learning environment?" The following grading was adopted for the degree of achievement of the items and domains of the study tool to determine the degree of approval based on the range equation as shown in Table 4. A one-way analysis of variance (level variable) and a t-test for the gender variable were used to answer the second question. Finally, the interviewees' answers were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's [36] scheme. The data was read and refined. Then, it was classified under main topics and themes. Finally, the results were reported.

Table 4. Criteria for interpreting the values of the means according to the range formula

Degree	Very Low	Low	Medium	High	Very High
Mean	1-1.80	>1.80-2.60	>2.60-3.40	>3.40-4.20	>4.20-5.00

4. STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment

Table 5 shows the means, standard deviations, and ranks for the study samples' responses to EFL students' attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment. The total score of EFL students' attitudes towards enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment was highly significant (M=3.82, SD=1.208). The second domain, peer-to-peer learning, ranked first with a high degree (M=4.05, SD=1.234). Under this domain, the respondents were very highly pleased to see my peers complete the speaking tasks successfully. Also, they highly respected the different perspectives of my teammates while speaking. The domain of social intelligence came in second place with a high degree

(M=3.85, SD=1.274). In this domain, the respondents highly enjoyed role identification assigned to them while speaking and did not hesitate to ask questions to their classmates during speaking tasks. Finally, the domain of teamwork ranked last with a high degree (M=3.57, SD=1.350). They highly believed that a group environment offers multiple stages of speaking opportunities and found that teamwork assists in enhancing speaking productivity.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment

No.	Domain-Items	Means	Standard Deviations	Rank	Degree
	Teamwork	3.57	1.350	3	High
1	I prefer speaking in a group environment rather than alone	3.51	1.434	4	High
2	I believe that a group environment offers multiple stages of speaking opportunities	3.62	1.463	1	High
3	I find that teamwork assists in enhancing speaking productivity	3.54	1.544	2	High
4	I cooperate with peers in group speaking tasks	3.59	1.516	2	High
	Peer-to-peer learning	4.05	1.234	1	High
1	I listen to my classmates with attention during speaking tasks	3.87	1.443	3	High
2	I am pleased to see my peers complete the speaking tasks successfully	4.40	1.197	1	Very high
3	I consider my peers' interests while speaking	3.79	1.407	4	High
4	I respect the different perspectives of my teammates while speaking	4.12	1.408	2	High
	Social intelligence	3.85	1.274	2	High
1	I enjoy interacting with my teammates while speaking	3.75	1.465	3	High
2	I enjoy participating in the tasks with my peers while speaking	3.73	1.431	4	High
3	I enjoy role identification assigned to me while speaking	4.00	1.377	1	High
4	I do not hesitate to ask questions of my classmates during speaking tasks	3.91	1.353	2	High
	Total	3.82	1.208		High

As shown in the statistical analysis the total score of EFL students' attitudes towards enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment was highly significant in terms of teamwork, peer-to-peer learning, and social intelligence. The results showed students having positive attitudes toward a collaborative learning environment can highly enhance their speaking skills. The participants expressed great satisfaction when observing their peers complete the speaking tasks. They held a deep appreciation for the diverse perspectives presented by their teammates during discussions. Additionally, they derived immense enjoyment from the assigned role identification during speaking exercises and demonstrated no reluctance in posing questions to their classmates. Furthermore, they held the belief that the group environment provided numerous stages for speaking opportunities and acknowledged that teamwork played a crucial role in improving speaking productivity. Reasons for the current results may be attributed to the fact that collaborative learning reduces anxiety and boosts confidence leading to more opportunities for students to practice speaking. Students are also exposed to various viewpoints, ideas, and a sense of community and belonging in this setting. These elements are all essential for enhancing the speaking skills of EFL students. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Priyantin [34], who found that 75% of students had favorable attitudes toward cooperative learning as a means of enhancing their desire to speak. The results of this study further corroborate Liang's [37] research, which found that collaborative learning greatly improved learners' enthusiasm to learn English and their spoken ability. The results of the current study align with earlier research by Talebi and Sobhani [38], who explored how cooperative learning has a large positive impact on the speaking proficiency of English language learners. The current study's findings are somewhat consistent with Al-Malki et al. [32], who found that cooperative learning improves EFL learners' social skills and intergroup relationships while also increasing their academic performance as well as knowledge of the course content. The results of this study concur with those of Al Jawad [13], who discovered that the cooperative learning approach enhances students' speaking abilities.

4.2. The effect of the respondents' study level and gender on their responses

Table 6 presents the results of the study sample's responses regarding their attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment. The findings indicate a high degree of employment of student-centered assessment practices by EFL teachers in the classroom, with a mean score of 3.99 and a standard deviation of 0.696. This suggests that the study sample is highly aware of assessment practices that prioritize students' needs. Regarding individual items, all values ranged between 3.37 and 4.45, indicating large to very large degrees of agreement. The only exception was item ten, which received a medium rating.

Table 6. One-way-ANOVA for the differences in the study samples' responses according to the study level

Domain	Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Teamwork	Between Groups	.789	2	.394	.216	.806
	Within Groups	653.177	357	1.830		
	Total	653.966	359			
Peer-to-Peer Learning	Between Groups	3.944	2	1.972	1.296	.275
	Within Groups	543.167	357	1.521		
	Total	547.111	359			
Social Intelligence	Between Groups	3.738	2	1.869	1.152	.317
	Within Groups	579.274	357	1.623		
	Total	583.012	359			
Total Degree	Between Groups	2.404	2	1.202	.823	.440
	Within Groups	521.387	357	1.460		
	Total	523.791	359			

The result means that the respondents' study level did not play any role in their responses to enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment. Reasons for the current results may be attributed to students' prior experience with collaborative learning, which they all preferred equally regardless of their study levels. In addition, the opportunity for students of all levels to frequently practice speaking English helped to reduce anxiety, increase confidence, and foster knowledge sharing in a group learning setting. It is noteworthy that the researchers were unable to discover any research to cite, either for or against the conclusions of the current study attributed to the study level variable.

Table 7 shows the results of the gender variable on the study sample's responses to their attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment. In addition, Table 7 shows statistically significant differences at the level of (0.05) in the EFL students' attitudes towards enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment according to the gender variable in favor of males. This result indicates that the male students showed higher attitudes than their female counterparts. Reasons for the current results may be attributed to the fact that males are more at ease speaking English in a collaborative environment than females. Numerous factors, including socialization patterns and personality differences between individuals, could be the reason for this result. Another reason may be that males in the current study context might understand the advantages of collaborative learning for unseen situations. Additionally, males and females likely perceive collaborative learning differently. For instance, males can be more inclined to assume various positions in organizations where speaking abilities play a crucial role, whereas women might be more persuaded the other way around. However, the findings of the current study are in contrast to those of Er and Ataç [18], who found that attitudes toward cooperative learning differed by gender in favor of females. In addition, the results of the present study partially contradict those of [8]. According to their findings, it can be assumed that both the classroom environment and the absence of measures taken by teachers and students prevent both male and female students from learning speaking skills effectively.

Table 7. T-test for the differences in the study samples' responses according to gender

Domain	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Teamwork	Male	210	3.76	1.250	3.213	358	.001
	Female	150	3.30	1.440			
Peer-to-Peer Learning	Male	210	4.25	1.058	3.833	358	.000
	Female	150	3.76	1.399			
Social Intelligence	Male	210	4.08	1.108	4.061	358	.000
	Female	150	3.53	1.421			
Total Degree	Male	210	4.03	1.059	3.938	358	.000
	Female	150	3.53	1.340			

4.3. Better ways through which collaborative learning environment can enhance EFL students' speaking skills

Teachers' responses regarding better ways to enhance EFL students' speaking were qualitatively analyzed. The results of the content analysis showed that the interviewees believed that grouping students by levels would improve their speaking abilities. They suggested that creating a safe, encouraging environment in the classroom is essential and that students should focus more on their performance rather than their marks. The importance of speaking skills should be emphasized before students enter universities by involving them in pair work, group work, role-playing, and debates on topics related to their daily lives, as well as by encouraging them to speak freely. Additionally, students should be made aware that speaking is

more about learning and mastering a language than it is about receiving a grade. The essential point on which the teachers emphasized was a particular aspect of using technology in the classroom which, in their opinion, will inspire students to speak inside and outside of the classroom. Some selected excerpts are listed as follows:

T1: "The group work works a lot. Making the groups according to students' levels for sure helps to boost students speaking competence".

T4: "Practice makes a man perfect. The saying applies here. Asking students to practice in a real environment helps a lot. More focus should be on school education before they enter the university".

T6: "A supportive and non-risky environment should be created in the classroom and students should not worry about their results".

T9: "A teacher can encourage the students to be friendly with other students and the teacher can motivate the students to speak in English with the teacher and with other students.

T11: "Well-organized conversation should be held, the practice should be made compulsory, and awards or marks should be reserved for it".

T13: "Students should be told that the chief objective of engaging in speaking is learning and mastering language rather than getting marks".

T18: "Today is the world of technology. Using technology in teaching like WhatsApp, Telegram, and other applications. will encourage students to speak in and outside the classroom".

T20: "Gradual upbringing of students will improve students speaking skills. We need to start gradually from one step to another, in other words, from easy to difficult level".

T21: "The best way to enhance EFL students' speaking, or conversational skills is to offer them interactive learning activities such as role-playing, debates, and simulations.

T23: "It is also important to provide ample opportunities for students to practice their conversation skills through language exchanges or other group activities like pair work, group work, role-playing, and debates".

T27: "Additionally, providing structured feedback and corrections can help improve their speaking skills through tracking progress and recognizing improvements".

T28: "Group work is the key in speaking sessions. When they are divided into small groups by having proper time to practice, they improve speaking significantly".

T29: "Creating a friendly environment is a huge change in developing students speaking ability".

T30: "Choosing relevant topics from daily life, motivating others to speak freely, setting examples of good students, and encouraging with consolation and appreciation are the best possible ways to enhance EFL students' speaking skills".

Finally, the qualitative analysis revealed that there are many ways students can enhance their speaking abilities in a collaborative learning environment, including but not limited to grouping students according to their academic levels, fostering a supportive environment in the classroom, highlighting the significance of speaking abilities before students enter universities, and engaging students in activities like pair work, group work, role-playing, and debates on subjects related to their daily needs. Using technology in the classroom, according to the content analysis, will encourage students to speak both inside and outside of the classroom, as well as encourage them to speak freely, making students aware that speaking is more about learning and mastering a language than it is about achieving a grade. Reasons for the content analysis findings may be attributed to the fact that through a collaborative learning environment, students benefit in a variety of ways, including more opportunities to practice speaking, exposure to various viewpoints and ideas, comments from peers, a feeling of closeness and community, activities for pair and group work, and activities involving role-playing and presentations. The findings from the analysis of the present study are consistent with those of Sembiring and Dewi [39], which demonstrate that the collaborative learning approach can be an effective way to enhance students' speaking abilities and create a positive learning environment. The results of the content analysis of the current study also support the findings of Hung and Mai [40], Murad et al. [41], and Wijaya [42], who concur that group tasks and collaborative learning are good ways to improve students' speaking abilities.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify EFL students' attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment. According to the findings, students with positive attitudes toward collaborative learning environments can highly enhance their speaking skills. In addition, the respondents' study level did not play any role in their responses to enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment; however, male students showed higher attitudes than their female counterparts. Finally, the

participants suggested several strategies to enhance EFL students' speaking skills within a collaborative learning environment. These strategies include grouping students according to their academic level, creating a supportive classroom atmosphere, emphasizing the significance of speaking proficiency, and engaging students in activities such as pair and group work, role-playing, and debates on topics relevant to their everyday lives. The content analysis also revealed that incorporating technology into the classroom would encourage students to speak both inside and outside of the classroom. This study has implications for educators, decision-makers, and researchers working in the field of English language education since it highlights the potential of collaborative learning environments to improve EFL students speaking skills. The researchers recommended that teachers incorporate collaborative learning strategies in the pedagogy not only to enhance EFL students' speaking skills but also the efforts should be extended to strengthen other language skills, especially writing skills. The study focused solely on students in the PY at a single university in Saudi Arabia, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other populations or contexts. The use of a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, while valuable for collecting data, may not capture the full complexity of students' attitudes and experiences. Furthermore, the study did not explore the impact of other factors, such as prior language learning experiences or cultural backgrounds, which could influence students' attitudes toward enhancing speaking skills in a collaborative learning environment. Future studies could address the limitations of this study by using a mixed-methods approach, including objective measures of speaking proficiency and expanding the sample to include students from different universities or countries. Additionally, investigating the impact of factors such as prior language learning experiences, motivation, and cultural differences on students' attitudes toward collaborative learning environments could provide valuable insights. Furthermore, examining the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies or interventions in enhancing speaking skills in collaborative learning environments would be beneficial.

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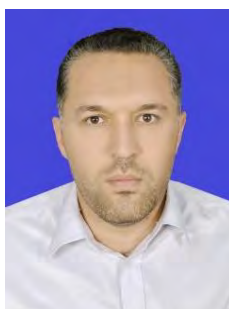
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