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University Students' Perceptions of Collaborative Learning in a Project-Based Language Learning Group Presentation

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This study investigates university students' perceptions of Collaborative Learning (CL) in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context using an extended Project-based Language Learning (PBLL) group presentation. The primary method for data collection was conducted using pre- and post-project surveys that consisted of five-point Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The first survey aimed to collect students' preconceptions about CL, then after engaging in an 8-week group presentation project, a post survey was issued to determine how the experience affected students' perceptions. In total, 61 advanced-level EFL Korean university students participated in this study. Data from the surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative thematic analysis. Findings revealed that students initially held positive views about CL's potential for academic growth and language skill improvement but held reservations about potential issues that could arise. Upon completion of a structured PBLL group presentation project, results showed that students' experience produced more favorable views about collaboration's ability to support and enhance learning. Based on the findings, CL offers benefits such as improving students' understanding of academic content, increased confidence, interpersonal skill development, and English language improvement. Implications about how to effectively implement CL in the EFL classroom are provided.

[English as a foreign language (EFL)/project-based language learning (PBLL)/ collaborative learning (CL)/group project/Korean university students]

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, project-based language learning (PBLL) has gained attention for its potential to build communicative competence, learner autonomy, and engagement in meaningful language use (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Thomas, 2000). Drawing from project-based learning (PBL) and experiential education, PBLL emphasizes collaborative, goal-oriented tasks that culminate in real-world outcomes such as reports or presentations (Stoller, 2006). Its learner-centered design aligns with principles of active participation, relevance, and ownership of learning (Kolb, 1984; Thomas, 2000). However, despite its theoretical appeal, PBLL remains underutilized in East Asian higher education, where teacher-centered instruction and exam-based assessment are more frequently employed (Yang & Tan, 2019). Specifically, in Korean universities, group assignments are common but frequently face challenges such as unequal participation, unclear expectations, and coordination difficulties (Kim, 2016). This is especially the case in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts where students may vary in confidence, proficiency, and prior experience. As a result, how students in these settings perceive and engage in collaborative PBLL tasks remains an open question.

Although PBLL can take various forms, not all formats foster the same level of collaborative learning (CL). While some projects divide tasks with minimal interaction, others require shared responsibility, co-construction of knowledge, and joint decision-making (Dooly, 2008; Oxford, 1997). Meaningful collaboration is not guaranteed, especially when students lack familiarity with group-based academic tasks or have limited experience in negotiating interpersonal roles. Even when completing the same task, students may engage in group work differently, which, if not carefully considered, can have adverse effects on the desired outcome. In Korean EFL settings, few studies have examined oral communication projects that demand sustained, real-time collaboration (Lee et al., 2022). To address this gap, the PBLL group presentation project in this study was intentionally structured to emphasize collaboration throughout all stages. Rather than assigning individual speaking parts, students co-developed content, negotiated language choices, rehearsed together, and coordinated presentation strategies during the project period. This structure aimed to foster both linguistic and interpersonal engagement, positioning PBLL not only as a language learning method but also as a context for examining how collaboration unfolds in practice.

This study draws on Farouck's (2016) multi-phase PBLL framework, grounded in sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). Farouck's model emphasizes scaffolded collaboration through reflective dialogue and peer negotiation, making it particularly suited to EFL contexts. While PBLL research increasingly highlights its benefits for language development,

motivation, and content learning (Jaleniauskiene & Venckiene, 2025), fewer studies have examined how learners experience collaboration as an evolving group process and taking into account their preconceptions and how their experience shapes their views. In particular, little is known about how students in East Asian university settings perceive collaborative learning prior to and after the experience of an extended project that requires developing content knowledge, managing roles, navigating interpersonal dynamics, and making joint decisions in a group setting. Addressing this gap, the current study explores how advanced-level Korean EFL students perceived and responded to collaborative demands in a PBLL group presentation conducted over eight weeks of the semester. To guide this research, the following questions were developed:

1. What are advanced-level Korean EFL university students' initial perceptions of collaboration in a PBLL group presentation?
2. What changes do students report in their perceptions of collaboration after completing the PBLL group presentation?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Theoretical Foundations for Collaborative Learning

This study is grounded in socio-constructivist, social cognitive, and experiential learning theories, which emphasize social interaction, self-regulation, and active participation in learning. Namely, Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory highlights how learners develop through interaction within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where social support and scaffolding are crucial. In addition, Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory stresses the role of observation, reflection, and feedback in fostering learner self-efficacy and autonomy. Kolb and Kolb's (2017) experiential learning cycle complements these ideas by describing learning as a process involving concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation. Finally, Bruner's (1996) theory of cognitive growth further supports the view that learners construct knowledge through guided discovery and culturally meaningful participation. These foundational theories are especially relevant in EFL contexts, where language is both the medium and object of learning. Taken together, they provide a strong basis for designing CL experiences that promote individual development alongside group interaction.

Building on these foundations, CL is a widely recognized approach in foreign language education, as it involves learners working together to achieve shared goals through dialogue, cooperation, and mutual support (Dillenbourg, 1999; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). CL suits

language classrooms well because it places an emphasis on interactions, encourages authentic communication, sustains engagement, and provides learners with opportunities to develop linguistic and interpersonal skills. However, the successful implementation of CL depends heavily on the structure and quality of interaction that takes place. Moore and Kearsley (1996) identify three types of educational interaction: learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner. Of these, peer interaction is particularly crucial in collaborative settings, with studies in Korean university EFL classrooms demonstrating benefits such as improved speaking fluency, reduced anxiety, and increased willingness to communicate (Kim, 2016; Lee, 2017). These findings underscore the importance of examining how collaboration occurs in task-based contexts like Korean EFL classrooms.

A common way for EFL instructors to structure CL in language education is through PBLL, which encourages sustained peer interaction through meaningful, goal-oriented tasks. PBLL builds on general PBL principles by adapting a student-centered approach that emphasizes not only student autonomy and group accountability, but also the integration of content and language-learning objectives into real-world projects. While there are several models for implementing PBLL into an EFL context, the present study relied on the framework of Farouck (2016). Farouck's framework consisted of a seven-phase PBLL project, which was selected because it was developed in a Japanese university context that aligned closely with the classroom conditions common in Korean and other East Asian EFL settings. This model guides students through scaffolded stages, including: 1. introducing the project and PBLL curriculum, 2. preparing groups, 3. selecting the driving questions, 4. accessing resources, 5. building language and presentation skills, 6. collaborative revision, and 7. final presentation delivery (Farouck, 2016). Each phase offers targeted opportunities for peer interaction and language development, supporting both individual and group progress. By embedding CL within a clear, task-based framework, Farouck's model exemplifies how language instruction can promote active, sustained participation in formal education. The following sections build on this by tracing the evolution from PBL to PBLL (Section 2.2) and reviewing CL and PBLL applications in East Asian EFL university contexts (Section 2.3).

2. Bridging PBL and PBLL in Language Education

PBL is a commonly employed instructional approach in classrooms that promotes student autonomy, inquiry, collaboration, and authentic product creation through sustained engagement with meaningful topics. Rooted in constructivist and experiential learning theories, PBL positions learners as active participants who explore real-world problems and generate knowledge through social interaction and reflection (Stoller, 2006; Thomas, 2000). Although definitions vary across disciplines, scholars generally describe PBL as a structured, multi-phase process involving extended, student-driven inquiry into authentic, real-world

questions that foster collaboration and active knowledge construction (Beckett, 2002; Dooly & Masats, 2019; Greenier, 2020; Kim, 2023). Larmer et al. (2015) further emphasize that project phases typically include initiation, investigation, product creation, presentation, and reflection, to promote sustained engagement and skill development. Importantly, PBL differs from related approaches such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Content-Based Instruction (CBI). TBLT targets specific linguistic outcomes through shorter communicative tasks (Ellis, 2003), whereas PBL focuses on extended, interdisciplinary projects that integrate inquiry and collaboration to produce authentic outcomes (Boss & Larmer, 2018). Similarly, while CBI uses pre-selected content to teach language, PBL emphasizes learner-driven exploration and tangible products (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Fried-Booth, 2002; Mohamad & Tamer, 2021). These features make PBL particularly appealing in university language classrooms that seek to develop learner autonomy, critical thinking, collaboration, and integrated skills.

Building on PBL's foundations, PBLL adapts these principles to prioritize language development through meaningful, project-driven tasks. While PBLL is applicable in first-language contexts, its implementation in foreign-language settings is beneficial in providing authentic communication, collaboration, and learner autonomy opportunities. Moreover, PBLL retains PBL's focus on student-centered inquiry and teamwork but places linguistic development at the core by integrating language objectives with content exploration and real-world application (Beckett & Slater, 2019). This focus aligns with action-oriented approaches that view learning as holistic and communicative (Jaleniauskiene & Venckiene, 2025; Piccardo & North, 2019), emphasizing that language and content knowledge evolve and develop in unison rather than separately. In these structured approaches, learners engage in cognitively demanding, linguistically rich tasks that promote integrated skill growth and long-term learning (Beckett & Slater, 2005; Dooly & Masats, 2019; Farouck, 2016). Furthermore, PBLL emphasizes collaboration, reflection, and scaffolding as essential design elements that help develop communicative competence by integrating fluency and accuracy within meaningful interaction. Finally, beyond linguistic outcomes, PBLL cultivates transferable life skills that extend beyond the classroom, including creativity, adaptability, and interpersonal communication (Jaleniauskiene & Venckiene, 2025).

Recent PBLL research highlights its effectiveness in enhancing both language proficiency and broader educational outcomes such as critical thinking, motivation, and intercultural awareness. Systematic reviews indicate consistent gains in speaking, vocabulary, and collaborative skills across diverse contexts. For instance, Mohamad and Tamer (2021) analyzed the global development of PBLL since the 1980s and identified strong evidence for student-centered, inquiry-driven learning. Similarly, Sedubun and Nurhayati (2024) found that PBLL enhances communicative competence, autonomy, and engagement, while Jaleniauskiene and Venckiene (2025) emphasized its role in supporting self-regulation and

critical thinking through authentic project environments. However, implementation challenges remain, including limited time, inconsistent assessment practices, and variation in project design (Mohamad & Tamer, 2021; Walker & Leary, 2009). To address these issues, researchers advocate for stronger curriculum alignment, improved teacher preparation, and coherent assessment frameworks (Mohamad & Tamer, 2021). Additionally, emerging studies explore AI-supported PBLL, which provides adaptive scaffolding and feedback, but also introduces new concerns about access, equity, and overreliance on technology (Yiling et al., 2025). As PBLL continues to evolve across diverse educational settings, these developments highlight the need for context-sensitive, collaboration-oriented approaches that reflect local classroom realities. Accordingly, Section 2.3 examines how collaborative project work has been interpreted and implemented in East Asian university EFL contexts, with particular attention to Korean settings.

3. PBL and PBLL in East Asian EFL University Contexts

Across East Asia, university language programs have increasingly adopted project-oriented pedagogies to promote authentic communication, collaboration, and learner autonomy. While many studies describe such practices as PBL, they align closely with PBLL principles when language functions as both the medium and goal of instruction. For example, Farouck (2016) developed a seven-phase PBLL cycle in a Japanese university that improved students' presentation skills and group accountability through scaffolded collaboration. Similarly, Spring (2020) and Kato et al. (2023) demonstrated how digital video projects and intercultural telecollaboration fostered motivation and interaction between Japanese and U.S. undergraduates. In China and Taiwan, PBLL adaptations have shown comparable benefits for communicative competence and engagement (Wuttiphan, 2024; Yang & Harijanto, 2022). Recent work also highlights the growing integration of online collaboration and AI tools to support feedback and reflection in East-Asian university classrooms (Sugie, 2024). Collectively, these studies indicate that PBLL's emphasis on inquiry, teamwork, and authentic communication is increasingly compatible with East Asian higher education, though contextual constraints remain.

Despite regional advances, the adoption of PBLL in Korean universities remains limited and uneven. Research suggests that exam-driven curricula, hierarchical classroom dynamics, and uncertainty about group roles often hinder the full implementation of collaborative projects (Kim, 2016). When collaborative projects are implemented, they frequently take the form of short, presentation-based assignments rather than sustained inquiry cycles that aim to propel the development of language and content knowledge through an iterative process. Nonetheless, emerging studies point to a gradual shift. For example, Song et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review showing PBL's positive effects on critical thinking and all

major language skills (speaking, writing, reading, vocabulary) in EFL settings, and Jung (2021) detailed how collaborative video projects enhance motivation, self-efficacy, and task value among Korean EFL students. These examples illustrate PBLL's growing potential in Korean higher education; however, research remains scarce on learners' perceptions of collaboration and their reception of group work in extended student-centered projects. The present study addresses this gap by examining collaborative interaction within a structured PBLL cycle in a Korean university EFL classroom.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Research Context and Project Design

This study was conducted at a private university in South Korea during the fall semester of 2024. The university operates on two campuses, each represented by one of the two researchers, both serving as instructors for a required three-credit general English course focused on writing and speaking that met twice a week. There was a total of four different sections of the same course (i.e., two sections at one campus and two sections at the second campus), and the final task was a group presentation. Across all sections participating in this study, the course shared the same title, final project, public-speaking learning objectives, and assessment criteria. Finally, the university administers a placement test prior to the first day of freshman classes to determine the level of students. All four sections participating in this study were labeled as "advanced-level" learners based on the university's internal method of leveling students through placement tests or professor recommendation.

To ensure consistency across campuses, the researchers held several pre-semester virtual meetings to coordinate course planning, align assessment procedures, and co-design the PBLL group presentation project that served as the course's final assessment. The design was grounded in an adapted six-phase PBLL framework based on the work of Farouck (2016), introduced earlier in Section 2.1. While the adapted framework emphasized scaffolded collaboration and iterative practice and reflection opportunities, some changes were made to better suit the instructional context. Specifically, Phase 4 (Provision of Tools and Resources) was omitted because students possessed knowledge of the resources required, while Phase 5 (Language and Presentation Skills Development) was expanded to allow learners to further develop their verbal and nonverbal communitive skillsets. These modifications resulted in a six-phase model used to guide a cohesive PBLL group presentation project that served as the final assessment for the course.

2. The Six Phases of the PBLL Group Presentation Project

This study's PBLL group presentation project was structured across six phases over eight weeks to guide students through collaborative presentation preparation and delivery. In the first week, students completed a pre-project survey to establish baseline expectations and were introduced to the project and its primary objectives. Additionally, students were assigned to groups based on random selection as directed by the instructors and given an opportunity to become acquainted through ice-breaking activities. Week two focused on clarifying the project's weekly tasks, developing collaborative skills through team-building activities, and beginning topic brainstorming. By week three, groups selected a problem-solution topic and started planning their presentation. Between weeks three and five, students researched and developed their content collaboratively, presenting drafts and outlines in practice sessions to receive peer and instructor feedback. During weeks six and seven, groups refined their scripts, created visual aids, and rehearsed independently to ensure smooth delivery, equal participation, and that the criteria of the project was fulfilled. Finally, in weeks seven and eight, students delivered their final presentations, which were evaluated by instructors and peers. The instructors' evaluation comprised of grading the completed presentation, considering the combined efforts of the group, as well as each student's individual ability. Lastly, students completed a post-project survey to reflect on their collaborative experiences and learning outcomes. This phased approach emphasized iterative skill development, teamwork, and reflective practice, culminating in a well-structured group presentation. Table 1 summarizes the key focus and activities of each project phase.

TABLE 1
Phased Timeline of the PBLL Group Presentation Task

Phase	Week(s)	Project Focus	Phase Description
1. Project introduction	1	Introduction & group formation	• Complete pre-project survey • Understand the project's focus • Groups formed through random selection
2. Project task & teamwork development	2	Project tasks & team building	• Outline weekly task schedule • Build teamwork skills • Review presentation structure • Begin brainstorming topic ideas
3. Topic selection & initial planning	3	Topic development	• Select topic (problem-solution) • Begin planning group presentation • Practice presentation 1: Present topic idea to the class and receive feedback
4. Content knowledge & presentation skills development	3-5	Content development & skills building	• Develop content knowledge and essential presentation skills • Create initial speech outline

			• Practice presentation 2: Present structured outline to the class and receive feedback
5. Rehearsal & refinement	6-7	Rehearsal & revision	• Revise presentation outline (script) • Develop visual aids • Review project criteria • Independent group rehearsal
6. Final presentation delivery	7-8	Final delivery	• Deliver final group presentation before an audience of peers • Instructor and peer evaluation • Complete post-project survey

3. Participants

A total of 65 students were initially recruited from four advanced-level sections of a required English course taught by the two researchers. After excluding incomplete responses and students who classified themselves as "non-EFL," the final sample consisted of 61 students (34 female, 27 male). Most were first-year students placed in the advanced-level courses through the university's placement test ($n = 42$) or faculty recommendation ($n = 19$). Participants represented a range of majors, including Humanities (27.9%), Nursing and Physical Therapy (25.2%), Computer and Software (13.1%), Engineering (9.8%), Art and Design (8.2%), Law (8.2%), Business and International Trade (3.3%), and Social Sciences (3.3%).

The students participating in the study were placed in advanced-level classes based on the university's level test or transferred with a professor's recommendation; however, to more clearly identify the students' levels, participants were asked to determine their self-reported level based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) proficiency standards (Council of Europe, 2025). The most reported level was B2 (36.1%), followed by B1 (24.6%), C1 (21.3%), and A2 (11.5%). Furthermore, questions in the pre-project survey aimed to gain a clearer reference point of the participants' current English ability. Multiple five-point Likert-scale questions were asked to determine participants initial English proficiency levels. According to the five-point Likert scale, students self-rated their receptive skills more highly (reading = 3.52; listening = 3.42) than their productive skills (writing = 3.05; speaking = 2.80). These baseline measures provided context for interpreting pre- and post-project comparisons in collaboration and perceived language development.

4. Measurement Tools

This study used two primary instruments (i.e., a pre-project survey and a post-project survey) designed to address the research questions regarding students' initial perceptions of collaboration (RQ1) and how these perceptions changed after completing the PBLL group

presentation (RQ2). The pre-project survey collected background information, including demographic details such as gender, year level, major, and placement into the advanced-level English course. It also asked students to self-assess their English proficiency across the four key language skills and their overall perceived ability using five-point Likert-scale items (i.e., very low proficiency to very high proficiency), supplemented by a multiple-choice question that asked participants to indicate their perceived CEFR level (see section 3.3). Next, to explore attitudes toward collaboration the survey included questions adapted from research on peer-peer interaction by Hsieh (2015). The survey included seven Likert-scale items addressing confidence, expected benefits, and perceived challenges of group work (e.g., "I believe I will be able to collaborate well with my peers"), along with a multiple-choice question asking whether collaboration "helps" or "hinders" learning. Finally, four open-ended questions asked students to reflect on how collaboration might impact their learning, their initial impressions of their assigned group, their confidence in working collaboratively, and anticipated challenges.

Following the conclusion of the final presentation a post-project survey was administered, which repeated several pre-survey items to allow for direct comparison over time, including self-rated English proficiency questions and the seven Likert-scale items regarding perceptions about collaboration adapted from Hsieh (2015). In addition, the post-project survey introduced five new Likert-scale items focused specifically on perceived improvements in English skills attributed to the collaborative project (e.g., rating whether speaking skills improved through group work). Furthermore, it included an open-ended question for further reflection on collaboration's impact on language development. Together, these measures combined a descriptive approach with qualitative analysis to understand how learners' perceptions towards collaboration and their language learning within a PBLL context changed over time.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

Both surveys were created using Google Forms and distributed via the university's LMS and in the classroom through QR codes. A shared Google Drive folder housed all materials related to the study, including drafts, final instruments, and anonymized response data labeled with student codes (e.g., S1, S2). Surveys were developed collaboratively by the two researchers through their pre-project meetings before being reviewed by a dual-lingual professor with over fifteen years of experience. Based on that expert's comments, minor revisions and Korean translations were added to the survey to increase clarity. The pre-project survey was administered mid-semester, shortly after the midterm exam and before initiating the group project, while the post-project survey was given during the project's final week upon completion of the presentation. Participation was voluntary, meaning that

students could stop at any time, and students who failed to complete tasks or surveys were removed from analysis.

Survey data were analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics and qualitative thematic analysis. Frequency counts and mean scores were calculated for the Likert-scale items to illustrate trends in students' self-reported English proficiency, collaborative beliefs, and satisfaction with group communication. Open-ended responses from both surveys were examined inductively, following the qualitative procedures outlined by Merriam (1998). After initial familiarization with the data, both researchers coded responses to identify recurring patterns and ideas. Through iterative discussion and correspondence, these codes were refined into broader categories and emergent themes that reflected students' evolving views on collaboration and learning. Particular attention was given to comparing reflections before and after the PBLL project to identify meaningful changes in perceptions and reported behaviors. The lead author synthesized and finalized the analysis to ensure consistency and alignment with the research questions, and representative quotations were selected to illustrate key themes and capture the range of students' experiences. This integrated analytic process combined descriptive statistics with qualitative insights to offer a comprehensive understanding of how students engaged with collaborative language learning within the PBLL framework.

IV. FINDINGS

1. Students' Initial Perceptions of Collaborative Learning

Before beginning the project, participants were asked to report their initial attitudes toward CL and expectations about the PBLL group presentation. Descriptive results from Likert-scale survey items provided an overview of students' general beliefs, followed by open-ended responses offering insight into their perceived benefits and challenges. Together, these findings establish students' pre-project perceptions and serve as a baseline for later comparison.

1) Descriptive Overview of Pre-Project Perceptions

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for seven Likert-scale survey items measuring students' initial perceptions of CL on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Overall, students expressed moderately to strongly positive expectations regarding collaboration, believing it would enhance both their learning and English skills. Six out of seven items had combined agreement rates ranging from approximately 72% to

85%. The highest agreement was found in items related to exposure to diverse perspectives ($M = 4.33$), collaborative problem-solving ($M = 4.08$), mutual academic support ($M = 4.03$), and confidence in working well with peers ($M = 4.03$). However, students showed slightly less certainty about enjoying the collaborative process itself, with this item having the lowest mean score ($M = 3.43$) and the largest proportion of neutral responses (37.7%). This suggests that while students generally anticipated academic benefits from CL, they were somewhat unsure about the emotional or social aspects of working in groups.

TABLE 2
Students' Initial Views of Collaborative Learning

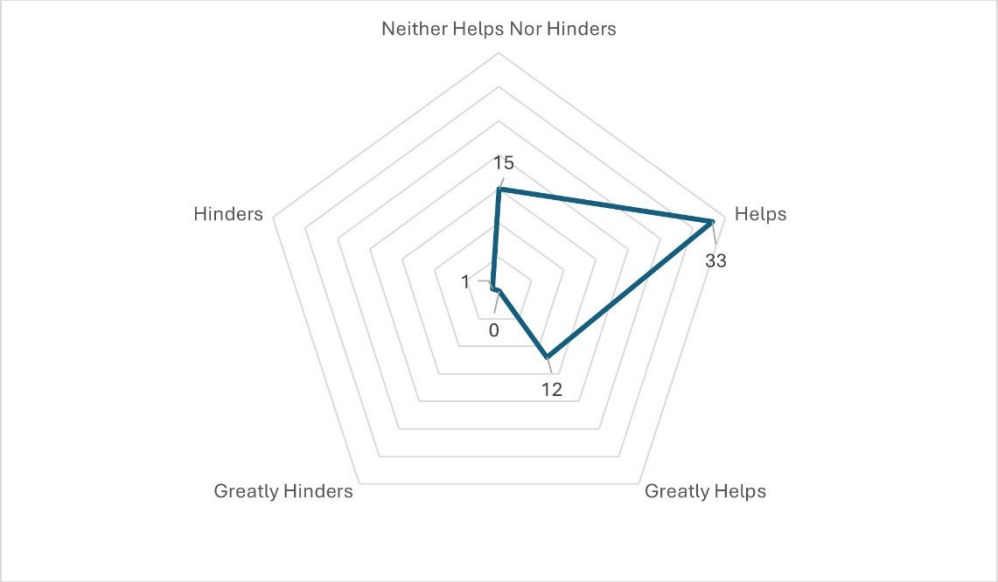
Statement	Str. Dis.	D	N	A	Str. Agr.	*M*	*SD*
I believe I will enjoy the collaborative learning process.	0	8	23	26	4	3.43	0.81
I believe I will be able to improve my English through collaborative learning.	1	3	13	34	10	3.80	0.83
I believe I will be able to learn content knowledge through collaborative learning.	0	1	16	31	13	3.92	0.74
I believe I will be able to collaborate well with my peers/group members.	0	0	14	31	16	4.03	0.71
I believe I will be able to form a better understanding of difficult materials through the help of a group.	0	1	11	34	15	4.03	0.71
I believe that discussions and problem-solving with peers/group members will help my learning.	0	0	13	30	18	4.08	0.71
I believe hearing different thoughts and opinions from peers/group members will help my learning.	0	0	9	23	29	4.33	0.72

Note. Str. Dis. = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neither Agree nor Disagree, A = Agree, Str. Agr. = Strongly Agree; *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation

2) Students' Initial Perceptions of How Collaborative Learning Helps or Hinders Learning

To further explore students' views, participants responded to a survey item asking whether they believed CL helps or hinders their learning, rated on a 5-point scale from *Greatly Hinders* to *Greatly Helps*. As shown in Figure 1, the majority of students reported positive views about collaboration, selecting that it *Helps* (54.1%) or *Greatly Helps* (19.7%) their learning. About one-quarter (24.6%) were neutral, while only a single student (1.6%) felt that collaboration would hinder their learning. No students reported that collaboration *Greatly Hinders* learning. These results demonstrate a broad confidence in the academic value of collaborative work, alongside some uncertainty.

FIGURE 1
Student Pre-Project Views About Whether CL Helps or Hinders Learning



3) Students' Reasons for Why Collaborative Learning Helps Learning

While the descriptive statistics in the two previous sections offered a broad overview of students' initial beliefs about CL, the open-ended survey responses offer a closer look at the specific reasons why students felt group work might support their learning. These responses were coded thematically, and the results are summarized in Table 3. It should be noted that students were free to write about their views openly, resulting in responses that often included multiple benefits or even a mix of advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, the frequency counts reported in Table 3 reflect how often a theme appeared across all responses, not how many individual students endorsed each one.

TABLE 3
Students' Reasons Why Collaborative Learning May Help Learning

Theme	Frequency	Representative Student Comments
Communication development	39	S31 – "Collaborative learning helps my learning because it allows me to see different perspectives and approaches to the same material, which broadens my understanding and encourages deeper thinking."
Teamwork skill development	26	S13 – "If my teammate has a strenth [*sic*] that I don't have, It can surely improve my learning experience."
English improvement	23	S61 – "When I have collaborative learning, I have more chances to speak with teammates in English. As a result, I get a chance to improve my English learning and skills."

Content knowledge development	22	S12 – "I think it will be helpful because I can learn about various ideas and thoughts through collaborative learning, unlike when I do it alone. ... Moreover, I think it has a positive effect by filling in the parts I missed or lacked."

Across the 61 open-ended responses, four major themes emerged that describe how students believed collaborative learning might support their learning: Communication Development (n = 39), Teamwork Skill Development (n = 26), English Improvement (n = 23), and Content Knowledge Development (n = 22). Communication Development was the most frequently mentioned, with students often describing how hearing diverse perspectives through discussion could enhance understanding and critical thinking. One student (S37) shared, "Collaborative learning offers diverse perspectives, helping me develop critical thinking and communication skills. Sharing ideas and problem-solving with peers enhances my understanding." Teamwork Skill Development emphasized the idea that group members bring different strengths, allowing students to complement each other and achieve outcomes they might not reach alone. English Improvement comments highlighted how collaborative work creates meaningful opportunities to speak and listen in English, which students saw as key to language development. As one student (S10) noted, "I strongly believe that every language is learned by using it frequently… collaborative learning, making students interact and talk in English, greatly helps my learning." Finally, Content Knowledge Development included ideas about learning new information or reinforcing understanding through peer explanations and discussions. Although these were the most common themes, several students also mentioned additional benefits such as reduced anxiety and increased motivation when working with supportive peers.

4) Students' Reasons for Why Collaborative Learning Hinders Learning

While most students expressed optimism about the benefits of CL, many also noted potential concerns. As with the previous section, these reflections were drawn from the same open-ended survey responses analyzed thematically. Students were free to express themselves openly, and many offered a mix of positive and negative views. Table 4 presents five recurring concerns students raised about how collaboration might hinder their learning. As before, frequency counts reflect how often a theme appeared, not how many students endorsed each theme.

TABLE 4
Students' Reasons Why Collaborative Learning May Hinder Learning

Theme	Frequency	Representative Student Comment
Unbalanced commitment	9	S58 – "... it depends on the attitude of teammates and myself. ... if my teammates are unenthusiastic, I tend to

		become passive, too. I think it is because the energy of individual influences the whole team."
Adverse group dynamic	7	S13 – "... Some people are too passive about team learning. They just keep silence [*sic*]."
Compromised workflow	6	S33 – "...If the members of group is fine [*sic.*] (e.g. actively joining), the process of learning will improve us. But the other case is awful. That case will be waste of time and bring me stress. It will mess up learning in not only this class but also other class [*sic*]."
Elevated anxiety	4	S49 – "I'm just a nervous about failing my teammates just because of me [*sic.*]. I think I'm doing my best, but for them, it might not."

Across the 61 open-ended responses, several students shared concerns about how CL might hinder their progress. The most common theme, Unbalanced Commitment (n = 9), reflected worries about unequal participation and how others' disengagement might negatively affect group morale. One student (S32) explained, "If my peers don't focus on our project... it hinders my learning." Adverse Group Dynamic (n = 7) referred to interpersonal challenges, such as passivity or disagreements among group members. Compromised Workflow (n = 6) focused on inefficiencies, with students pointing to scheduling difficulties, coordination issues, and distractions that made it harder to concentrate on their own learning goals. One student (S08) shared, "Collaborative learning can sometimes hinder my progress because it involves coordinating with others, which can disrupt my focus on personal areas of improvement." A smaller but significant number of students (n = 4) described experiencing Elevated Anxiety, particularly around their language abilities or fear of letting their teammates down. As S18 put it, "I tend to be quite shy, so I find this part a bit intimidating." While these concerns were less frequent than the benefits students described earlier, they highlight the importance of managing group dynamics thoughtfully. Finally, one student (S11) raised a less common but notable concern about Diminished English Development, writing, "If I keep using basic words, my level of vocabulary can be set to an easy-English." Although rare, this comment reflects the nuanced ways in which group learning may impact individual experiences regarding unbalanced levels and language development.

2. Students' Post-Project Perceptions of Collaborative Learning

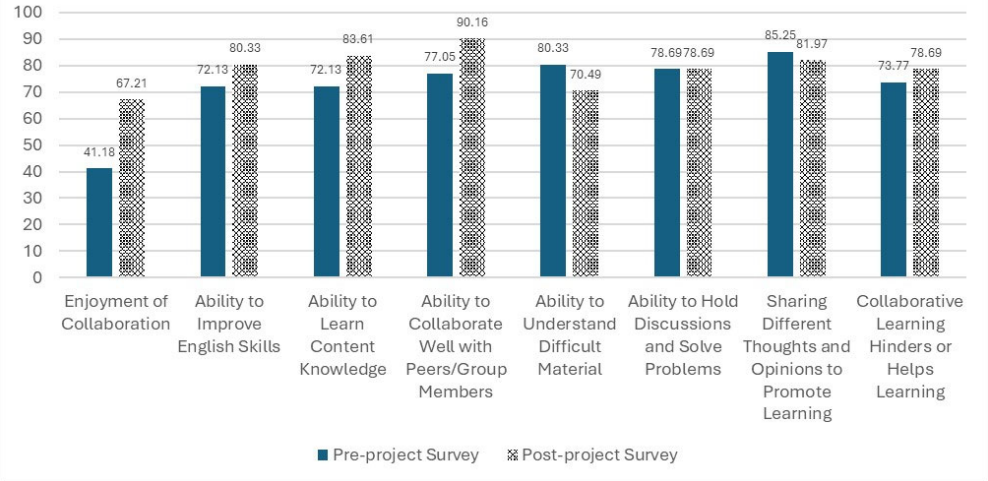
To answer the second research question, this section explores students' post-project perceptions of CL following their participation in an extended PBLL group presentation. As in the pre-project survey, students responded to a series of Likert-scale survey items addressing their beliefs about collaboration. The same seven items were used, but a separate set of five Likert-scale items was added to ask students to self-assess their English skill

improvement. Finally, open-ended questions were asked to explore how collaboration was perceived to help or hinder their learning over the course of the project. Together, these results offer insight into how students' perceptions of CL evolved over time, and how the experience may have supported their language development.

1) Descriptive Overview of Post-Project Perceptions

Post-project survey results indicate a generally positive shift in students' attitudes toward CL. In contrast to the pre-project survey, where some uncertainty remained, especially regarding the potential enjoyment of collaboration, students' post-project responses showed increased agreement about the helpfulness of CL based on their experience. Likert-scale results revealed that students' overall perceived helpfulness of CL to be higher, and, in addition, the initial survey items tracking students' views about collaboration all ranked highly with four of the seven items reflecting an increase in agreement. These results are summarized in Figure 2, which presents a side-by-side comparison of pre- and post-project responses.

FIGURE 2
Comparison of Pre- and Post-Project Perceived Helpfulness of Collaborative Learning



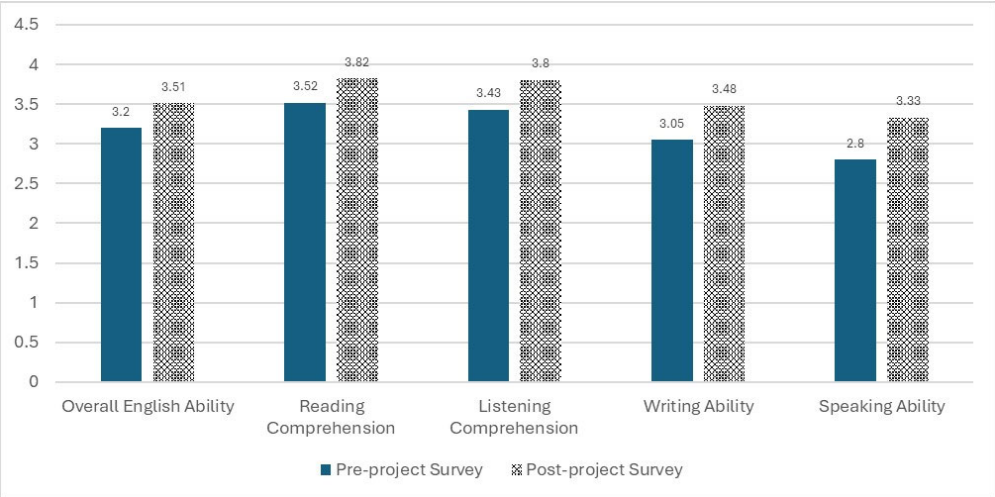
The most notable shift occurred in Statement 1, "I enjoyed the collaborative learning process," (M = 3.82) which, although it remained the lowest-rated item overall (67.21% agreement), showed the largest increase compared to the pre-project results. This suggests that students' initial hesitations about the interpersonal aspects of collaboration were, for many, positively reshaped through their experience. Similarly, the statement, "I collaborated

well with my peers/group members," maintained high levels of agreement (M = 4.31), with a significant majority (90.16%) of students selecting *Agree* or *Strongly Agree*. Finally, other highly rated items included students' belief that exposure to differing opinions helped their learning (M = 4.26), discussions and problem-solving with peers supported learning (M = 4.20), and the sense that collaborative work helped them engage with content more deeply (M = 4.10). Students also showed increased agreement in statements related to their English and understanding of difficult material, although mean scores for these items remained just below 4.00. Overall, these findings reflect that students' experiences with CL were generally positive, with many indicating that their expectations were met or exceeded.

2) Students' Perceived Language Gains through the PBLL Project

In addition to the core CL-focused items, students were asked to evaluate their own language development through five Likert-scale items related to specific skill areas: speaking, writing, reading, listening, and overall English ability. As shown in Figure 3, students reported perceived improvement across all five areas, with speaking showing the most notable gain. The mean score for speaking increased from 2.80 to 3.33, reflecting the communicative demands of group work that required students to regularly interact, negotiate, and present in English. Writing also saw a substantial increase, from 3.05 to 3.48, followed closely by improvements in reading (3.52 to 3.82) and overall English ability (3.20 to 3.51). Listening showed a smaller but still positive shift (3.43 to 3.48). These results suggest that students viewed the PBLL group project not only as an opportunity to engage with topical content but also as a valuable context for practicing and improving their English, particularly in productive language skills.

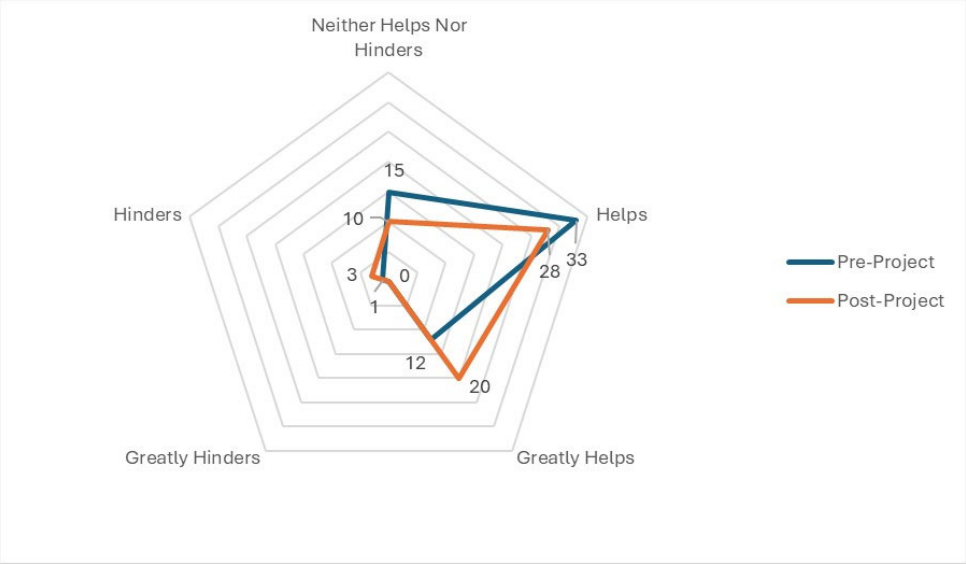
FIGURE 3
Pre- and Post-Project Comparison of Students' Perceived English Ability



3) Students' Post-Project Perceptions of How Collaborative Learning Helped or Hindered Learning

To complement the earlier pre-project findings, the post-project survey again asked students whether they felt CL helped or hindered their learning, using the same 5-point scale ranging from *Greatly Hinders* to *Greatly Helps*. Results are displayed in Figure 4, which overlays pre- and post-project data to show shifts in perception. Following the project, a large majority of students reported that collaboration either *Helped* (45.9%) or *Greatly Helped* (32.79%) their learning, which is an overall agreement rate of 78.69%. Only 4.92% of students selected *Hindered*, and none selected *Greatly Hindered*. The remaining 16.39% remained neutral. These results suggest that most students ultimately viewed collaboration in a positive light after completing the extended PBLL group presentation project.

FIGURE 4
Pre- and Post-Project Comparison of Whether CL Helps of Hinders Learning



Compared to the pre-project survey, these post-project results reflect a modest but meaningful positive shift in students' perceptions of collaboration. Notably, the percentage of students who believed CL *Greatly Helps* their learning increased by more than 13 percentage points, while the proportion of neutral responses decreased by 8 percentage points. These changes suggest that students' lived experience working collaboratively over several weeks helped confirm, or improve, their views about the academic value of CL. While a small number of students maintained neutral or slightly negative views, the overall pattern shows that the extended PBLL experience helped move many students from initial uncertainty to a clearer belief in the benefits of collaborative work.

4) Students' Reasons for Why Collaborative Learning Helped Their Learning

While the Likert-scale data showed broad agreement that collaboration enhanced learning, open-ended responses provided richer insight into how and why students felt this way. These responses were coded thematically, resulting in six key themes: Purposeful Communication, Group Synergy, English Improvement, General Skill and Content Knowledge Development, Comfortable Atmosphere and Socialization Development, and Motivation and Confidence Development that are presented in Table 5. As before, responses were often multifaceted, and frequency counts reflect how often each theme appeared across all responses, not how many students endorsed each one.

TABLE 5
Post-Project Reasons Why Collaborative Learning May Help Learning

Theme	Frequency	Student comments
Purposeful communication	31	S03 – "The biggest advantage is that I can hear diverse opinions. I think that through collaborative learning, people with different backgrounds and perspectives can share ideas, providing a richer learning experience."
Group synergy	20	S12 – "My group members helped me improve the quality of the finished product by filling in the gaps that I hadn't thought of and the areas that I lacked."
English improvement	16	S29 – "Collaborating with my peers helped improve my English skills. Talking with peers who are better at English helped me learn new expressions. Also, observing their speaking flow was beneficial for improving my own speaking skills."
General skill & content knowledge development	15	S34 – "In addition, the fact that you can find materials on the subject together and enrich it, and that you can listen to various opinions and get the best ideas among them seems to be the advantage of cooperative learning. Above all, even if there are parts that I don't understand in class or assignment, it was good because team members help me understand. [*sic.*]"
Comfortable atmosphere & socialization development	9	S28 – "Collaborating with my colleagues helped me. I felt comfortable asking questions about things I didn't know or was uncertain about, and we relied on each other to help me with things I struggled with."
Motivation & confidence development	8	S08 – "Discussing and rehearsing with peers improved my confidence and allowed me to refine my communication skills effectively."

Across the 61 open-ended responses, the two most frequently cited reasons why collaboration helped learning were Purposeful Communication ($n = 31$) and Group Synergy ($n = 20$). Students described how exchanging ideas, hearing new perspectives, and giving and receiving feedback pushed them toward deeper understanding. One student (S06) noted, "When you get feedback from other people I think it makes the quality of the work higher." Similarly, Group Synergy emphasized the benefits of shared effort, where students could rely on one another to fill knowledge gaps. As S49 put it, "Since we could help each other to improve our weaknesses... it can improve our learning process a bit more rather than learning by oneself." Students also valued the opportunity to practice English in an active, authentic way ($n = 16$), often highlighting how exposure to more fluent peers supported their language growth. As one student explained (S31), "It encourages active participation and communication in English." Meanwhile, others mentioned gaining both content knowledge and professional skills such as organizing ideas and presenting. While less frequent, several students also appreciated the social and motivational aspects of collaboration, describing the group as a comfortable space to ask questions, build confidence, and feel inspired to contribute. Overall, students expressed that working collaboratively enhanced their learning in ways that extended beyond academic content, offering both cognitive and interpersonal growth.

5) Students' Reasons for Why Collaborative Learning Hindered Their Learning

Although most students viewed collaborative learning positively, a small number of students expressed concerns about how group work had hindered their learning based on their experience. Three primary themes emerged from their open-ended responses: Unbalanced Commitment, Communication Difficulties and Conflicts of Agreement, and Limited English Usage. These themes reflect the most commonly cited issues that arose during collaboration and are summarized in Table 6. It's worth noting that only ten comments (16.4%) mentioned any form of hinderance, indicating that such challenges were not widespread but still significant enough to consider in improving collaborative learning environments.

TABLE 6
Post-Project Reasons Why Collaborative Learning May Hinder Learning

Theme	Frequency	Student comments
Unbalanced commitment	5	S10 – "I think it quite hindered my learning when there is a teammate that doesn't really participate in the group project."
Communication difficulties & conflicts of agreement	3	S17 – "... based on my experience, they posed significant challenges in integrating different opinions. It was necessary to make compromises by slightly adjusting each other's arguments, but this proved to be quite difficult."
Limited English usage	2	S46 – "However, relying on Korean for easier communication may limit full English practice."

The most frequently mentioned challenge was Unbalanced Commitment (n = 5), where students expressed frustration with teammates who did not participate equally. One student (S11) reflected that "the non-cooperation of the team members led to the increase in the workload of other team members," highlighting how uneven effort could undermine both productivity and learning, and potentially lead to animosity that would have a negative impact on the group dynamic. Communication Difficulties and Conflicts of Agreement (n = 3) also hindered learning in some groups, especially when disagreements were poorly managed or when students felt their opinions were overlooked. For instance, S20 noted that "team members were fixated on their own opinions and weren't open to collaboration," which made working together more difficult. Lastly, a few students (n = 2) reported that their use of Korean during group work limited opportunities for English usage, reducing the chance to practice and improve their proficiency in the target language. Despite these challenges, the relatively low number of negative comments supports the overall positive perception of collaborative learning. Most students reported feeling satisfied with their group's performance and the experience of working toward a shared goal. However, these issues reveal the importance of actively supporting balanced participation, open communication, and consistent use of English in collaborative learning environments.

V. IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore advanced-level Korean university students' perceptions of CL before and after participating in an extended and structured PBLL project. The results reveal generally positive academic expectations and recognition of CL's benefits in enhancing learning, particularly through exposure to diverse perspectives and peer interaction. Students highlighted the development of communication, teamwork, and English skills as key outcomes. However, challenges related to group dynamics, unbalanced participation, and language use also emerged, underscoring the complex nature of collaborative projects. These findings provide important implications for the design and facilitation of CL in EFL settings, particularly in East Asian contexts where students entering higher education are often transitioning from teacher-centered secondary education where collaborative skills are underdeveloped. Understanding student perceptions and views about how CL helps and hinders their learning is essential to developing more effective teaching practices and curriculum design for group work.

One key implication of this study is that while advanced EFL students generally approach CL with positive academic expectations, their emotional and interpersonal experiences during extended group work remain mixed and require thoughtful instructional support. Students in this study expressed discomfort with interpersonal conflict, unequal participation, and communication breakdowns, even as they acknowledged the value of peer learning and group accountability. These findings reinforce the importance of addressing not only the cognitive but also the affective dimensions of collaborative learning (CL), especially in contexts like Korean university classrooms where hierarchical norms and exam-focused educational practices may inhibit open peer interaction (Kim, 2016). This challenge is further amplified in general English courses that enroll students from diverse majors and proficiency levels, where instructors face practical difficulties in implementing presentation-based, problem-solving tasks and providing individualized feedback (Im & Son, 2024). In line with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Bruner's (1996) ideas on guided participation, instructors should provide structured opportunities for social scaffolding to help learners navigate collaboration more confidently. This belief aligns with Moore and Kearsley's (1996) framework highlighting the importance of learner-learner interaction and confirms earlier studies emphasizing the need for intentional support of interpersonal processes in CL (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). Ultimately, supporting emotional engagement in PBLL environments may be as critical to project success as designing cognitively demanding tasks.

Another important implication of this study is that while English served as the primary language of instruction and communication, some strategic use of students' shared L1 may be necessary to support clarity, group coordination, and task success. Students reported clear perceived gains in their English skills, with speaking being reported to have the largest

increase across all measured categories. This suggests that the collaborative, communicative nature of the PBLL project created meaningful opportunities for language use, supporting claims from prior research that PBLL fosters integrated skill development through authentic tasks (Beckett & Slater, 2019; Song et al., 2024). However, despite these gains, some students noted difficulty understanding complex materials or giving and receiving feedback in English, which points to the importance of targeted scaffolding throughout the project. In such cases, allowing limited and purposeful use of the L1, such as for clarifying instructions, checking comprehension, or managing group roles, can help reduce cognitive load and ensure that all students remain engaged and focus on use of the target language effectively in productive tasks. This approach aligns with Kolb and Kolb's (2017) experiential learning cycle, which emphasizes the need for reflection and adaptation during learning, and supports emerging research on the pedagogical value of scaffolded support strategies in collaborative EFL settings (e.g., Dooly & Masats, 2019; Farouck, 2016). Rather than fully avoiding L1, instructors should adopt a flexible, balanced approach that supports learners' linguistic growth while also ensuring comprehension and group cohesion.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of creating mechanisms for accountability and reflection into PBLL to address variability in student participation and perceptions of fairness. While many students recognized the collaborative benefits of pooling skills and resources, concerns about unequal workload distribution, unbalanced commitment, and role confusion were frequently cited as obstacles to successful group work. These findings reconfirm known challenges in PBLL implementation across East Asian contexts, where students often face unclear expectations or limited training in group collaboration (Kim, 2016) or may struggle when working with peers from diverse majors and proficiency levels, as is common in general English courses (Im & Son, 2024). To address this, instructors should incorporate structured formative assessments, including peer/self-evaluations, anonymous feedback opportunities, and guided reflections, that allow students to monitor and adjust group dynamics before final project delivery. This recommendation supports calls in the PBLL literature for improved process-oriented assessment and clearer criteria for group accountability (Mohamad & Tamer, 2021; Song et al., 2024). Moreover, it aligns with Kolb and Kolb's (2017) experiential learning cycle, which emphasizes ongoing reflection as a key element of deep learning. By proactively supporting group equity and task ownership, instructors can create more inclusive and sustainable PBLL environments that respond to both individual and collective learning needs.

While the findings of this study offer valuable insights into students' perceptions of CL within an extended PBLL framework, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the researchers also served as instructors of the participating courses, which may introduce potential bias despite efforts to maintain consistency and objectivity across sections. Additionally, the study focused on a relatively small sample of advanced-level learners at a

single Korean university, which limits the generalizability of the results to other proficiency levels or educational contexts. Future research could explore similar implementations across different institutional settings, with more diverse learner profiles, or conducted over longer timeframes to better capture the evolution of collaborative competence and language development. Further investigation into the role of group composition, language choice, and peer feedback mechanisms would also deepen understanding of how to optimize PBLL for EFL learners. Overall, this study contributes to growing evidence that CL, when thoughtfully structured and supported, can foster not only linguistic growth but also interpersonal and metacognitive development. As PBLL continues to gain traction in East Asian university classrooms, sustained attention to emotional engagement, task design, and group dynamics will be key to realizing its full pedagogical potential.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Levels: Tertiary

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