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Exploring Collaborative Learning Experiences among Preservice English Teachers: A Qualitative Case Study

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This qualitative case study examined a semester-long experience of collaborative learning among seven preservice teachers of English, highlighting their attitudes toward collaborative learning as a viable instructional approach and their perceptions of the successes and challenges during collaborative engagement. Data were gathered from the preservice teachers' reflection papers, the final project, an interview, and the researcher's reflective log, and analyzed qualitatively. The findings demonstrated that the preservice teachers regarded their collaborative learning highly as it allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of the course content and produce a more refined final project. They also appreciated their collaborative experience, recognizing the criticality of teachers' collaborative competence in actual educational contexts, and considered their collaborative experience as the groundwork for the future. The preservice teachers credited their successful collaboration to active participation and effective communication among team members. They ascribed their smooth communication to attentive listening, respect for different opinions, and ongoing feedback. Despite their overall success, they also encountered some challenges, such as aligning schedules and harmonizing different perspectives. However, they effectively managed these difficulties. Future research across diverse sociocultural and educational settings would deepen our understanding of how collaborative learning is conducive to preservice teachers' learning to teach.

[collaborative learning/preservice teachers/teacher education/English language teaching/cooperative learning]

I. INTRODUCTION

Collaboration has become a defining competence for 21st century learners (Global partnership for education, 2020; OECD, 2005; Voogt & Roblin, 2012). While teamwork has long been valued in professional contexts, the unprecedented complexity and interconnectedness of the contemporary globalized world have made collaborative competence not only more relevant but also indispensable for academic and professional success (Laal & Laal, 2012). In contemporary knowledge-driven societies, successful outcomes are increasingly attributable to the concerted efforts of groups that integrate diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and areas of expertise to address complex challenges rather than to the achievements of individuals working independently (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Geisinger, 2016). In addition, the necessity to engage productively with people from different nations, languages, and cultures intensifies the importance of collaborative skills for graduates entering globalized work environments. Collaborative learning in higher education, therefore, has been a vital pedagogical approach to foster both social interaction and cognitive growth, enabling students to co-construct knowledge and cultivate skills crucial for their academic and professional success.

Generally used as an umbrella term for diverse educational approaches engaging students in group-based activities, collaborative learning[1] refers to an instructional method in which two or more learners work together in a small group format to achieve shared learning objectives, such as solving a problem or completing a project (Barkley et al., 2014; Dillenbourg, 1999; Gillies & Boyle, 2008; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). In collaborative learning contexts, students are encouraged to explore theories and course materials instead of passively accepting them from a teacher. They are expected to actively interact with peers while sharing opinions and ideas, asking questions, and clarifying misunderstandings, through which they jointly construct a new understanding of the topic. For collaboration to be successful, certain basic elements must be put in place: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skills, and group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, 2009). Considered the foundation of collaborative learning, positive interdependence is fostered when students perceive their outcomes as interconnected in such a way that the success of one individual is contingent on the success of all group members. Meaningful collaborative work also requires every participant to assume personal responsibility for contributing to the group task equitably. Promotive interaction exists when group members provide one another with active support and encouragement to achieve the group's learning goals. The development of social skills,

[1] Despite their distinct theoretical origins, collaborative and cooperative learning are used interchangeably in contemporary research. Therefore, both terms are used in this study.

such as effective communication, conflict resolution, and trust-building, is vital for groups to collaborate productively and must be systematically cultivated alongside academic ability. Group processing refers to a reflective practice in which group members discuss their interactions and assess their contributions to enhance effectiveness and productivity, thereby promoting both social and task-related improvements within the group (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, 2009).

Collaborative learning has been shown to have a beneficial impact on students' overall learning and development in the cognitive, affective, and social domains. Studies have reported improved theoretical and academic understanding, enabling students to comprehend disciplinary content more effectively (Chang & Brickman, 2018; Franzese & Irvin, 2025; Gillies, 2003; Zhang & Cui, 2018). Collaborative learning also enhances students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills while increasing their capacity to apply knowledge gained in one context to novel or cross-disciplinary tasks (Loes & Pascarella, 2017; Zhang & Cui, 2018). Engaging in collaboration has been proven to promote students' learning motivation, engagement, self-confidence, and self-efficacy (Johnson et al., 2014; Laal & Ghodsi, 2012; Ning & Hornby, 2014). In addition, learners participating in group-based instructional settings often develop more positive attitudes toward university learning and academic subjects in general (Johnson et al., 2014). Furthermore, through interactions with diverse peers, students become more receptive to cultural and intellectual diversity and develop a more open mindset toward different perspectives (Laal & Ghodsi, 2012). From a social perspective, collaboration fosters students' communication and interpersonal skills, promoting their ability to share ideas, coordinate tasks equitably and behave professionally (Chang & Brickman, 2018; Gillies, 2003; Lee, 2016; Morgeson et al., 2005; Zhang & Cui, 2018).

Despite these benefits, studies have documented the challenges learners experience (Capdeferro & Romero, 2012; Forrest & Miller, 2003; Isaac, 2012; Tucker & Abbasi, 2016). Students engaged in collaborative efforts have reported difficulties in coordinating their schedules and managing team logistics (Freeman & Greenacre, 2011; Le et al., 2018). Discrepancies in expectations—particularly concerning the quality of work, degree of commitment, and distribution of tasks—frequently lead to dissatisfaction (Butt, 2018; Livingstone & Lynch, 2000). Issues such as unequal workload distribution, 'free-riding' or 'dominating' behavior have been common sources of frustration (Gottschall & García-Bayonas, 2008; Le et al., 2018; Roberts & McInnerney, 2007). Poor collaborative skills and ineffective communication often exacerbate these difficulties (Freeman & Greenacre, 2011). In the absence of adequate instructor mediation or structured group support, students have felt alienated and preferred to complete their work independently (Gottschall & García-Bayonas, 2008; Le et al., 2018). Such resistance manifests as a desire to avoid group interaction due to past negative experiences or perceptions that collaboration hinders

efficiency.

Simply organizing students into groups and prompting them to work together does not automatically lead to genuine collaborative learning (Kuhn, 2015). Collaboration among learners develops through deliberate instructional strategies that promote mutual engagement and collective problem-solving (Barkley et al., 2014). Therefore, the success of collaborative learning fundamentally depends on teachers' capacity to orchestrate the conditions for productive interaction and learning outcomes (Barkley et al., 2014; Gillies & Boyle, 2008; Johnson et al., 2014). Effective teachers carefully design group activities to ensure that learners achieve meaningful curricular outcomes (Kuiper et al., 2009; Webb, 2009). During instruction, they not only explicitly communicate the purpose, structure, and norms of collaboration but also monitor progress, provide timely feedback, and pose reflective questions that prompt deeper thinking and strategic collaboration (Barkley et al., 2014; Kuiper et al., 2009). Given the critical role teachers play in the success of collaborative learning, comprehensive teacher education is essential to ensure that collaborative learning becomes a sustainable pedagogical practice in real-world educational settings. Pre-service teachers should not only become familiar with its theoretical underpinnings but also engage in collaborative learning firsthand to internalize its processes and benefits. Building upon the understanding of collaborative capacity as one of the core 21st century competencies and the need to prepare preservice teachers for collaborative classrooms, this qualitative case study aims to examine how pre-service English teachers in Korea experience collaborative learning during a teacher education course, bringing to light their lived experiences of collaborative engagement and their perceptions of collaborative learning as a viable instructional approach.

II. METHODOLOGY

1. Context and Participants

The present study was carried out at a private university in Korea. The participants were seven preservice teachers[2] enrolled in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Materials Design[3] class that I taught. EFL Materials Design is one of the core courses that the English department provides in its teacher training track. It was designed to develop students' comprehensive theoretical knowledge in materials design and development in English language teaching (ELT), while offering hands-on experience that facilitates the

[2] The class included eight students. This study, however, used data from preservice teachers who submitted all reflection papers.
[3] The title of the course is a pseudonym.

transfer of theory into practice. Among the seven participants, four were females. All were juniors and in their early to mid-twenties, except one who was in their thirties. All but one had part-time English teaching experience for an extended period of time, varying from 11 months to several years, while teaching from speaking and listening to reading and grammar. They all expressed great interest in working in the field of ELT after graduation, whether as a teacher in public schools and/or private institutes or as a material developer.

As a theory-practice integrated course, EFL Materials Design was intended for preservice teachers to spend approximately the first half of the semester mastering key theories on language materials development in lectures and group discussions. Group discussions were frequently employed to foster rapid rapport among the preservice teachers. The remainder of the semester consisted primarily of hands-on activities, that is, preservice teachers analyzing English textbooks used in secondary schools in Korea and adapting a segment within a chapter to fit an anticipated teaching context**,** with consideration of student profiles and educational factors (see Table 1). During this practice-oriented phase, the preservice teachers worked in teams. To foster cooperative, process-based learning, the practical phase featured cyclical project stages with both instructor and peer feedback. They held two conferences with me—posing questions, clarifying concepts, and refining their work—and delivered an interim mini-presentation to share work-in-progress drafts for peer input.

TABLE 1
Overview of Course Content and Collaborative Learning Activities

Week	Course content	Collaborative learning activities
1	Orientation to the course and collaborative learning	Highlighting collaborative learning as a core course component
2	Theory-based lectures	
3	Theory-based lectures	
4	Theory-based lectures	
5	Theory-based lectures	
6	Theory-based lectures	Forming a team Providing an overview of the project, describing its constituent elements, and defining components essential for effective collaborative learning
7	Theory-based lectures	Selecting their textbook and engaging in the materials design project as a team outside class
8	Midterm exam	
9	Theory-based lectures	Collaborating on the project outside class
10	Theory-based lectures	Collaborating on the project outside class
11	Sample textbook analysis	Collaborating on the project outside class
12	Team conference 1	Receiving teacher educator feedback
13	Interim presentation	Exchanging peer feedback
14	Team conference 2	Receiving teacher educator feedback
15	Final presentation	Exchanging peer feedback
16	Individual & whole-class debriefing	Reflecting on their collaborative learning individually and as a class

The collaborative learning format of the course was explained at the beginning of the semester, setting expectations for a team-based materials design project**.** In the weeks preceding the practical phase, time was allocated to form teams and prepare for the collaborative activities. Given the small class size, collaborative learning teams could be formed in pairs, triads, or quartets. The preservice teachers chose to work in pairs. In addition, they preferred to select their own team members. Class time was also devoted to exploring the prerequisites for effective collaboration. We discussed and clarified that all members of each team must come prepared for project meetings for productive collaboration, emphasizing the individual student's responsibility for and contribution to a successful group work experience. The discussions further underscored that each team was required to complete a singular co-constructed project through sufficient intra-team feedback, communication, and opinion sharing.

2. Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data for this study consisted of four reflection papers[4] written by the preservice teachers while cooperating as a team for their materials design project. Throughout the practical phase of the course, the preservice teachers were encouraged to examine their experience of collaboration while documenting their thoughts and feelings. The reflection papers followed no predetermined format; however, a few general questions were included to assist their reflection process such as, what their experience was like for the past (two) week(s) while engaged in collaborative learning, what issues they confronted, and what successes and/or difficulties they experienced. The reflection papers were typically three to four pages in length. A semi-structured interview was also carried out at the end of the semester. The individual interviews lasted for approximately 5-10 minutes. The preservice teachers were encouraged to review their semester-long experience of working as a team and to share their new understanding and realizations while engaged in collaboration. Interview questions included, for example: "How has it been to work collaboratively in teams to accomplish the materials design project this semester?" "What do you think has been successful?" "What has been challenging?" and "Are there any comments and reflections that you would like to share that you did not mention in your reflection papers?" All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were conducted in Korean, and I translated them into English for the preparation of this manuscript. The preservice teachers' materials design projects were also gathered as part of the data. I also wrote my own reflective journal, recording my

[4] The preservice teachers wrote five reflection papers throughout the semester. However, for the present study, I used four reflection papers (2, 3, 4, and 5) that they wrote during the practice-oriented phase of the course.

observations, impressions, and thoughts each week, while bridging experiential data and literature. For this study, however, the preservice teachers' reflection papers were utilized as the principal data. My professor-researcher positionality was reflexively navigated to maintain transparency concerning potential influences of power asymmetries throughout data collection processes.

Rigorous qualitative data analysis was conducted in a dynamic and inductive manner (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 2009). Data collection and preliminary analysis proceeded concurrently, wherein emergent insights from the initial reading of the data informed subsequent data collection. This recursive process persisted throughout the study, complemented by an ongoing literature review to situate evolving interpretations within broader theoretical discourses. Upon saturation of the data, a meticulous data analysis was conducted. To facilitate systematic analysis, I read the full dataset several times, with recurrent thematic patterns systematically identified across the data. These multiple readings produced the initial coding categories, which were then checked across the entire dataset to confirm their usefulness. Through this repetitive process, some coding categories were merged into broader headings, while new categories emerged. Other categories were eliminated. This refining procedure ultimately yielded the final coding categories, some of which are as follows: "A truly valuable experience to learn the importance of working collaboratively," "developing the ability to collaborate with others," "gaining a deeper understanding of the theories and concepts on materials design and development," "enhancing the quality of the final project through collaboration," "collaboration is essential in educational settings," "an experience that serves as a strong foundation for carrying out collaborative duties as a teacher in the future," "our collaboration was highly successful," "active participation," "effective communication," "respect towards differing perspectives," "attentive listening," "prompt and ongoing feedback," "challenges in schedule alignment and opinion coordination," "overcoming through trust and collaborative spirit," and "grateful for developing essential skills as a preservice teacher." This iterative process of deconstructing the complete dataset and systematically reconstructing it in a new way enabled me to better understand how the preservice teachers in the study perceived their collaborative learning experience and what attitudes they showed towards their collaborative engagement.

III. FINDINGS

1. Collaborative Learning: A Learning Experience Like No Other

The preservice teachers thought highly of their collaborative learning experience in the

EFL Materials Design class, describing it as "a very meaningful" (Hyesun[5], R[6]2; Jinyoung, R3; Yuna, R2) and "positive learning experience" (Minji, R2), and one "that became an important turning point in [their] growth as a teacher" (Sunwoo, R2). They recounted that "by engaging in the collaborative process, [they] not only learned how to cooperative and communicate effectively with peers" (Bora, R5; Hyesun, R5) but also "became to realize the value of learning from each other" (Minji, R3). They further appreciated the opportunity to experience collaborative learning as they believed that "the collaborative competence is an essential skill required in an actual educational context" and that "learning how to interact with others was an invaluable experience [they] could not have gained anywhere else" (Sunwoo, R5).

1) Two Heads are Better Than One: Achieving a Better Materials Design Project Through Collaboration

Preservice teachers' positive perceptions of their materials design experience through collaboration were primarily because they believed that "collaboration was far more beneficial compared to working alone" (Jaemin, R2) and that "[they] were able to produce higher-quality final work through active discussion and mutual feedback" (Hyesun, R2):

> The greatest advantage of collaboration is that it helps me realize things that I would not have thought of on my own. Through collaboration, I learn new perspectives and develop new ideas. I have come to believe that collaboration is an indispensable part of the materials design and development process. (Bora, R2)

Indeed, the preservice teachers felt that conducting the project in a team format became an opportunity to "realize the power of collaboration" (Minji, R2). Yuna noted that "working in teams was highly beneficial as [she] was able to complement idea [she] might have missed if working alone" (R2), while Jinyoung reflected that "diverse opinions and ideas beyond [his] own extended and deepened [his] thinking" (R2):

> Working in a team greatly enriched the project. Ideas for materials adaptation and design that I would never have imagined on my own were refined and made more realistic through my partner's suggestions. For example, in adapting one of the activities, my original idea was to have students create a simple notice. My partner suggested designing it visually, like a real sign, to enhance engagement, which transformed the activity into something much

[5] All names are pseudonyms.
[6] To enhance readability, R will be used for reflection papers.

> more practical. These moments of discussion and collaborative fine-tuning enabled me to view the textbook from a new and broader perspective. (Minji, R3)

> One of my materials development ideas was to have students make and present a brochure about a local festival from the textbook, but my partner suggested that asking students to research and introduce a festival of their own interest would be far more engaging. At that moment, I realized that my design had focused too narrowly on the product rather than on the learning experience itself, so I redesigned the part from the students' perspective. This experience convinced me that collaboration broadens our perspectives. (Sunwoo, R2)

Jaemin also spoke positively of his collaborative experience as he thought his team "was able to make better of [their] project through discussion and interactive feedback" (R2):

> This collaboration allowed us to learn a great deal from each other. … When I compared my initial design ideas with those of my partner, I realized that my approach was somewhat limited in reflecting communicative language teaching or materials development theory, so I made significant modifications. If this project had been done individually, I feel that the project would have been far less sophisticated. (Jaemin, R2)

Sharing a similar view, Hyesun thought that she was able to make the project more practical and well-developed as she "completed the project together with a partner," which made her feel that the whole process was "more valuable" (R2). The preservice teachers regarded their collaborative experience in a positive light, as they thought that "the process of mutual review and discussion is a highly valuable learning opportunity that can only be gained through collaborative learning" (Minji, R3).

2) An Experience That Became a Foundation for Our Future

Another reason the preservice teachers showed favorable attitudes toward the collaborative learning approach in class was their belief that this experience would be "greatly beneficial for the process of working with other teachers in the future" (Hyesun, R5; Jinyoung, R3). They recognized that teachers in actual school settings "share ideas, exchange teaching materials, and cooperate on assessments methods and teaching strategies" (Sunwoo, R2), and that "they would need to collaborate if they became teachers" (Hyesun, R3). With this recognition, the preservice teachers found it "very helpful to experience the collaborate learning in advance" (Minji, R2):

> In high school and middle school, I often saw teachers of the same subject discussing tests and classroom activities in the teachers' lounge. As prospective teachers, we are experiencing this process in advance. Once we become teachers, we will still need to work with colleagues and rely on their support. I now understand that much of what happens in school simply cannot be accomplished alone. (Bora, R5)

> I have come to realize that education is never a solitary endeavor and that it cannot last without cooperation among fellow teachers. This team project offered me a precious opportunity as a future teacher to learn firsthand how to foster genuine and healthy collaboration within a community of teachers. (Sunwoo, R2)

Building on their positive experience in the EFL Materials Design class, the preservice teachers valued collaboration highly, describing it as "a strong foundation for fulfilling collaborative responsibilities as future teachers" (Minji, R2).

The preservice teachers' collaborative experience further appeared to bring about meaningful changes in how they perceived collaboration. Hyesun confessed that her initially somewhat negative view of collaboration had shifted into a positive one through this class:

> I generally do not prefer team activities. I have witnessed too many cases where one uncommitted member negatively impacts the entire project's outcome. … [However], this project made me realize that tasks such as materials development are much more effective when done collaboratively. … Through this experience, I rediscovered the value of teamwork and felt satisfied knowing that our collaborative outcome far surpassed what I could have achieved alone. (R2)

Jaemin expressed a similar sentiment:

> As someone who prefers independent learning and building my own understanding, I initially felt apprehensive about participating in group activities. However, through this course, I have come to believe that collaborative approaches can be effective for learning. ... Going beyond the mere reception of theory, the ongoing discussions with my partner during the application phase greatly helped me organize concepts and apply them properly to our materials design project. (R3)

The process of learning collaboratively further led some participants to reexamine their educational beliefs and the kind of teachers they aspired to become. Jinyoung shared that the collaborative learning format "helped form a collaborative teacher identity of learning

and teaching from one another" and that it "brought flexibility in [his] previously rigid teaching philosophy" (R5). For Sunwoo, it seemed an opportunity to reflect on and reevaluate his educational beliefs:

> Our collaborative discussions often produced diverse interpretations and ideas, which I found meaningful. During these exchanges, my partner even anticipated possible student reactions to our adapted materials that I had not imagined. Through this experience, I realized the limitations of developing materials alone and came to believe that education can truly progress through collaboration and sharing. (R3)

2. Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Collaborative Learning

Overall, the preservice teachers viewed their collaborative learning in the EFL Materials Design class as "a success" (Bora, R2; Hyesun, R2; Jinyoung, R2; Sunwoo, R2; Yuna, R2), largely attributing it to a shared sense of commitment and effective communication among team members. They emphasized, above all, the significance of their partner's active engagement. Jinyoung highlighted his partner's "enthusiastic leadership" and "willingness to take initiative," saying that "such an attitude" prompted him "to express [his] opinions more actively," thereby creating a sense of "synergy" within their team (R2). Likewise, Bora emphasized mutual commitment, observing that "[her] partner's diligence and passion inspired [her] to stay motivated and work harder" (R3):

> We attempted to incorporate diverse ideas based on different theories, which I believe made our collaboration successful. My partner was very proactive, always sending feedback and supplementary resources promptly, and I tried to respond as quickly. Because we both worked hard, we were able to complete the project successfully. (Bora, R2)

Hyesun also shared that she was "initially concerned about potential conflicts of opinion," but found their "collaboration smoother than expected" (R3). "Hav[ing] always preferred individual projects," she felt that collaborative learning "succeeded due to [her] partner's active engagement" (R3).

The preservice teachers also considered effective communication within their teams to be a key factor in the success of collaborative learning. They attributed this smooth communication primarily to mutual respect and attentive listening to each other's ideas and opinions during discussions. They reflected that "during collaboration, each came thoroughly prepared with diverse contributions for discussion" (Yuna, R2) while working by "respecting each other's opinions as much as possible" (Bora, R2):

> Respecting different views and communicating with open minds were also important elements for our successful teamwork. Even when there were slight differences in opinion, we listened carefully to each other's viewpoints and worked through them together. This allowed us to produce a final outcome that both of us were satisfied with. (Minji, R2)

The preservice teachers further credited their successful team communication to the timely and ongoing exchange of feedback between them. They "found reciprocal feedback beneficial as it enabled [them] to quickly assess the project's current status—what worked well and what needed further development" (Jinyoung, R2). They added that, in the feedback stage, they tried to avoid debates and focused on "promptly modifying and therefore improving the project based on feedback" (Bora, R3), which facilitated effective collaboration. Through this process of "continuously providing feedback on each other's ideas and making revisions" (Jaemin, R3), the preservice teachers felt that their collaborative work became "more efficient" (Minji, R2) and "the final product was able to develop further" (Jaemin, R3):

> I believe that our team collaboration was very successful. Through multiple rounds of feedback and revisions based on each other's ideas, we created one integrated final product. Joint discussions made the process meaningful. If we had simply merged our individual ideas or designs, it would have been difficult to produce a high-quality final product. (Hyesun, R2)

In a similar vein, Sunwoo regarded the experience of "continuously exchanging feedback to collectively improve the quality of [their] work" as the "most significant achievement" (R3) gained from collaborative learning:

> What made me feel most successful was … giving feedback on mutual ideas and constantly negotiating the direction of materials design collaboratively. … This reciprocal method—one suggesting ideas, the other critiquing and refining them—went beyond simple role division; I see it as a true collaborative creation. (Sunwoo, R3)

In addition to active engagement and effective communication, participants identified "strict adherence to agreed timelines and task fulfillment" (Bora, R3; Yuna, R3), and teammate's flexibility as crucial success elements:

> Due to my scheduling issues, there was once a delay, but even then, my teammate flexibly accommodated the change in completion time, which I greatly appreciated. I am grateful

> that, thanks to my partner, our collaborative work has progressed in a very constructive direction. (Jinyoung, R2)

Although the preservice teachers generally viewed collaborative learning in the EFL Materials Design class positively, their work was not without challenges. Yuna noted that during collaborative tasks, discussions sometimes turned into "debates" (R4) amid several revisions. "Coordinating schedules" (Minji, R2) for collaboration also posed difficulties. Sunwoo stated that "finding time to discuss was difficult due to differing schedules" (R2) while Hyesun confessed that "there were times when [she] felt the work pace was less efficient than working alone" (R3). Jaemin concurred:

> With limited prior experience with group projects, I encountered difficulties in aligning schedules. … The differing schedules between my partner and I made it difficult to proceed in the sequence I thought ideal. Through this experience, I learned the importance of carefully synchronizing schedules with my teammate before starting work. (Jaemin, R3)

Preservice teachers also confessed that when "integrating each other's ideas" (Jaemin, R3), they experienced "occasional conflicts due to differing opinions" (Minji, R2; Yuna, R3). Sunwoo recounted that "having different interpretations of the same content sometimes made it time-consuming to reach consensus" (R2), and elaborated as follows:

> As the project was team-based, subtle difficulties in reconciling different viewpoints arose during collaboration. Everyone naturally has an attachment to their own ideas, and since each of us values slightly different educational philosophies or teaching styles, even when pursuing the same goal, our priorities sometimes diverge. In such cases, we need to balance logical persuasion with emotional sensitivity. While avoiding conflicts, finding ways to guide discussions toward educationally productive outcomes was far from easy. (R2)

The preservice teachers acknowledged that "collaborative work was not always a perfect experience" (Minji, R2); however, they did not perceive these challenges negatively. Minji described them as "natural aspects inevitably encountered in collaboration," adding that "strong trust and willingness to cooperate among team members enabled [them] to resolve issues effectively" (R2). Hyesun reflected that they were "in the process of learning the importance of collaborative competence through these experiences" (R3). Yuna expressed gratitude for "learning to work with fellow preservice teachers holding diverse opinions," (R4) while Sunwoo positively evaluated it as "an opportunity to develop the ability to explore reasonable alternatives together" (R2):

> I came to understand that collaborative learning not only elevated our teacher education experience, but also served as a vital practice for improving our collaborative competence. Therefore, the collaborative experience in the EFL Materials Design class was a deeply valuable learning opportunity. (Sunwoo, R2)

Considering collaborative competence as the "essential competency teachers must possess" (Sunwoo, R3; Yuna, R4), the preservice teachers found it profoundly meaningful to have these experiences in their teacher education course.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study explored the collaborative learning experience of seven preservice English teachers, drawing attention to their attitude towards collaborative learning as a feasible instructional approach and their perceptions of factors that contributed to their overall successful collaborative engagement. The preservice teachers regarded their semester-long experience of collaboration highly because working together as a team enabled them to not only deepen their understanding of the concepts and theories of materials design and development but also achieve better results with their final project as they were able to complement each other's ideas through constant collaborative exchange of diverse perspectives and opinions. Recognizing that high collaboration efficacy is essential for succeeding as a teacher in contemporary society, they appreciated the opportunity to experience collaborative learning in advance during their teacher education years. Their constructive experience of collaborative learning further brought about changes in their initially negative views toward group learning, resulting in a positive reconceptualization of collaborative learning arrangements, which, for some, deeply impacted their teaching philosophy and professional identity.

As a key element enabling a successful cooperative experience, the preservice teachers pointed to proactive participation among team members and effective interpersonal communication. Understanding that collaborative contributions toward common goals were indispensable for success, the preservice teachers participated in their group work thoroughly prepared, demonstrating strong personal responsibility. They also cooperatively developed their projects by actively sharing and critiquing each other's viewpoints through reciprocal feedback, embodying the essence of promotive interaction. The preservice teachers attributed their effective communication to the fact that their team not only listened attentively to but also respected each other's ideas and suggestions. Even amid disagreements, they negotiated actively to refine ideas toward optimal alternatives, thereby cultivating their collaborative competence. Despite their overall positive experience of

working cooperatively, the preservice teachers also experienced some difficulties. They found it difficult to coordinate schedules for collaborative discussions, while it was even more difficult to negotiate and synthesize differing opinions into a consensus. Regardless of such difficulties, the preservice teachers spoke highly of their collaborative learning experience, viewing it as an essential educational opportunity that allowed them to learn how to work with others successfully and realize the importance of collaborative competence as future teachers.

The findings of the present study are consistent with previous studies, demonstrating that collaborative learning fosters enhanced understanding of course content and cultivates interpersonal and collaborative competence. The findings further confirm that coordinating schedules for group work was one of the major difficulties within the cooperative learning process. Despite long-standing research on collaborative learning, studies focusing on preservice teachers' cooperative experiences remain limited (Chan et al., 2024; Le et al., 2018). The present study, therefore, adds to the current literature by shedding light on the semester-long experience of learning together among preservice teachers while providing detailed accounts of their perceived successes and difficulties and their attitudes toward collaborative learning. Given that collaborative competence constitutes one of the foundational 21st century skills underscored by both the OECD (2019) and the 2022 revised curriculum of Korea (Ministry of Education, 2022), it seems pivotal for teacher education programs to offer opportunities for preservice teachers to experience collaborative learning firsthand to understand its benefits, limitations, and practical considerations if they are to effectively implement it in the future. These preparatory encounters will equip preservice teachers with the critical insights and skills necessary for enhancing cooperative learning practices, allowing them to motivate students' participation and facilitate meaningful and transformative learning experiences in classroom settings. In providing preservice teachers with experiential exposure to collaborative learning through the teacher education curriculum, they would be much benefited with sustained engagement, rather than isolated experiences, with diverse forms of cooperative learning across multiple courses. Therefore, teacher education programs should incorporate a structured series of theory-informed, practice-oriented classes, enabling preservice teachers to familiarize themselves with varied cooperative learning modalities and enhance their collaborative capacity.

As studies on preservice teachers' experiences in collaboration-oriented classes remain in their preliminary stage, more studies are needed that systematically investigate preservice teachers' cooperative learning experiences in diverse contexts, spanning various subject areas, classroom settings, and preservice teachers' characteristics. More specifically, as this study was conducted with a small cohort of highly committed preservice teachers, future research needs to examine cooperative engagement within larger class sizes

encompassing more diverse preservice teacher profiles. In addition, as the current study centered primarily on pair work, subsequent studies could explore group dynamics in larger formations comprising to 3-4 members or more. Furthermore, more in-depth investigations are warranted into specific facets of collaborative learning, including conflict resolution strategies, the critical influence of intra-group dynamics on learning outcomes, and the facilitative roles that teacher educators might assume. Methodologically, prospective studies will prove beneficial to incorporate diverse methodologies—qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches—in enriching our holistic understanding of collaborative learning processes when examining preservice teachers' engagement in cooperative endeavors. Prospective longitudinal studies could illuminate whether preservice teachers' initial enthusiasm for collaborative learning endures through the complexities of actual classroom implementation, thereby shaping their pedagogical beliefs and practices as in-service teachers.

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Examples in: English
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