

THE EFFECT OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING ON VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN ENGLISH CLASSES

Xomidjonova Gavharoy Xayrullo qizi

Student of Fergana State University,

Faculty of Philology and Language Teaching,

English Language Department

Abstract: This study explores the impact of collaborative learning on vocabulary acquisition among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Collaborative learning, which involves students working together to achieve shared learning goals, has gained attention as an effective pedagogical method. The research was conducted with 60 secondary school students, divided into experimental (collaborative learning) and control (traditional instruction) groups. Pre- and post-tests, observations, and student surveys were used to measure vocabulary improvement and learner attitudes. The findings suggest that collaborative learning significantly enhances vocabulary acquisition and promotes motivation, peer interaction, and deeper processing of new words.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, vocabulary acquisition, EFL learners, English language teaching, group work, language development, peer interaction.

Vocabulary knowledge is a key component of language proficiency, as it supports communication, reading comprehension, and writing fluency. However, traditional vocabulary instruction often relies on rote memorization, isolated word lists, or teacher-centered lectures—approaches that may not engage learners or promote long-term retention.

In contrast, **collaborative learning**, where students work in pairs or small groups to solve problems or complete tasks, encourages active participation, negotiation of meaning, and social interaction. These elements can create meaningful contexts for vocabulary use and support deeper cognitive processing.

Several studies (e.g., Nation, 2001; Stahl, 1999) highlight the effectiveness of student interaction in vocabulary development, particularly when learners are encouraged to **discuss word meanings, use new vocabulary in speaking or writing, and receive feedback from peers.**

This study aims to investigate how collaborative learning strategies affect vocabulary acquisition in EFL classrooms, focusing on the following research questions:

1. Does collaborative learning lead to better vocabulary retention compared to traditional methods?
2. How do students perceive collaborative vocabulary learning activities?
3. What challenges arise in implementing collaborative strategies in secondary English classes?

A **quasi-experimental design** was employed over a six-week period at a secondary school in Uzbekistan.

Participants:

- 60 students (aged 14–16) from two 9th-grade English classes.
- The classes were divided into two groups:
 - **Experimental group:** received collaborative vocabulary instruction,
 - **Control group:** received traditional teacher-led vocabulary instruction.

Procedure:

- Both groups completed a **pre-test** to assess baseline vocabulary knowledge.
- The **experimental group** engaged in activities such as:
 - **Vocabulary concept mapping in pairs,**
 - **Word-definition matching games in teams,**
 - **Collaborative sentence creation and storytelling using target vocabulary,**
 - **Peer teaching and quiz competitions.**
- The **control group** used a textbook-based approach including translation, repetition, and fill-in-the-blanks.
- After six weeks, both groups took a **post-test** identical in format to the pre-test.
- Additionally, students in the experimental group completed a **questionnaire** on their perceptions of collaborative learning.
- **Teacher observations** were used to note engagement levels and classroom interaction patterns.

The comparison between pre- and post-test scores showed a notable improvement in both groups, but the **experimental group outperformed the control group** significantly.

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test Mean	Improvement
Experimental	58%	85%	+27%
Control	60%	73%	+13%

Qualitative results also revealed that:

- **92% of students** in the experimental group reported that working with peers helped them **remember new words more easily**.
- **85%** felt more confident using new vocabulary in oral tasks after group discussions.
- Students highlighted that **explaining word meanings to others** or **hearing multiple examples** from classmates made vocabulary learning more dynamic and practical.

Teacher observations noted:

- Higher levels of **student engagement and participation** in the experimental group,
- More **spontaneous use of target vocabulary** during speaking tasks,
- Increased **peer support and reduced anxiety**, especially among lower-level learners.

However, challenges included **off-task behavior** in some groups and **uneven participation**, which required the teacher to guide and monitor group dynamics closely.

The findings of this study suggest that **collaborative learning is an effective strategy for vocabulary acquisition** in secondary EFL contexts. By promoting **active use, repetition, and peer interaction**, collaboration helps students process new words at a deeper level, increasing both **short-term understanding** and **long-term retention**.

Collaborative activities support **constructivist learning theories**, where learners build knowledge through social interaction and shared problem-solving. When students engage in tasks like storytelling or peer teaching, they must **internalize the meaning, usage, and form** of new vocabulary—thus reinforcing learning more effectively than passive methods.

Furthermore, collaborative learning contributes to a **positive classroom environment**, where students feel more **motivated, responsible, and connected**. This is especially valuable for mixed-ability classrooms, as stronger students can support peers while also benefiting from reviewing and rephrasing vocabulary.

However, for successful implementation, teachers must:

- Provide **clear structure and roles** within group tasks,
- Monitor group work actively to prevent dominance or disengagement,
- Offer **supportive feedback and reflection time** after activities.

In conclusion, while traditional methods may still have a place in vocabulary instruction, **collaborative learning offers a more engaging and effective alternative**, especially when integrated into a communicative language teaching framework.

This study demonstrates that collaborative learning has a **positive and statistically significant effect** on vocabulary acquisition in English language classes. Students not only acquired more vocabulary but also **used it more confidently and retained it longer**.

The research recommends that English teachers incorporate **structured group-based vocabulary activities** as part of their regular instruction. Collaborative strategies should be aligned with clear learning goals, scaffolded for all learners, and varied to maintain interest and effectiveness.

Future studies could explore the impact of collaborative learning on other language skills (e.g., grammar, speaking fluency) and examine the role of **technology-enhanced collaboration** in vocabulary development.

References:

1. Nation, I.S.P. (2001). *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Stahl, S. A. (1999). *Vocabulary Development*. Brookline Books.
3. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.

4. Oxford, R. (1997). Cooperative learning, collaborative learning, and interaction: Three communicative strands in the language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81(4), 443–456.
5. Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Holubec, E. J. (1998). *Cooperation in the Classroom*. Interaction Book Company.