Benefits Perceived by Vietnamese EFL Learners and Their Engagement in Online Collaborative Learning during the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The benefits of collaborative learning have been proven by previous research across disciplines, contexts, and levels of education. The present study aims to validate these benefits perceived by 76 English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners who experienced online-collaborative learning via group work activities in English translation classes at a local university, South Vietnam during the Covid-19 pandemic. Surveying these learners at the end of the course via a questionnaire and analyzing their reciprocal assignment discussion recordings were carried out. The survey results uncovered that the learners highly appreciated online collaborative learning because they perceived that it was beneficial to their future life, career, cognition, and social communication strategies. Their positive view on collaborative learning benefits was deemed to engage them in online group work activities while interacting with partners to complete shared assignments. Furthermore, the empirical discussion recordings analysis documented their sound engagement via a range of group work interactive acts. It is believed that these online purposeful interactions make learning occur, knowledge acquired, and social skills reinforced by the learners. As a result, the present study not only validates the robust benefits reported in previous studies, but also it could be used as a guidance to implement collaborative learning in teaching other subjects other than English translation.

Keywords: benefits; collaborative learning; EFL learner; engagement; group work

INTRODUCTION

Collaborative or cooperative learning rooted in the social interdependence theory refers to a variety of teaching methods in which students work in dyads or small groups to help one another learn academic contents (Golub, 1988; Slavin, 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Farrell & Jacobs, 2020). *In collaborative classrooms*, students learn to interrogate issues, share ideas, discuss and argue with each other, to assess each other's current knowledge and fill in gaps in each other's comprehension, i.e., mutually searching for and constructing knowledge, new understanding, solutions, or meanings, or creating a product. Collaborative learning is "a deliberate attempt to take advantage of differing perspectives through the interaction of individuals and their ideas in a reciprocal or alternating action" (Sills, 1988, p.21); capitalizing on co-laboring in which team members work together to share the workload equally as they progress to the task accomplishment (Panhwar et al., 2017). According to Barkley et al. (2014), three specifications of collaborative learning are (i) *intentional design* - teachers structure intentional learning techniques for learners by innovating already existent strategies or creating their activities; (ii) *co-laboring* - all learners in the group must engage actively in working together towards the objectives of the task; and (iii) *meaningful learning* - all learners must aim to improve their understanding of the subject matter.

Meanwhile, Golub (1988) contended that "collaborative learning has as its main feature a structure that allows for student talk: students are supposed to talk with each other....and it is in this talking that much of the learning occurs" (p.1), and Barron (2000) extended that talking in

collaborative learning encompasses several interactive learning processes such as explaining one's thinking, sharing knowledge, observing peers' strategies, sharing processes of monitoring solutions, providing critique, and engaging in productive argumentation. For these interactive learning processes to sufficiently take place over the course of collaborative learning, students must understand that they will be held accountable for their individual contributions to the group, that free-loading will not be tolerated, and that everyone must contribute to the group work (Gillies, 2007). Supporting individual accountability for expected outcomes in collaborative learning, Barron (2000) maintained that students must engage in coordinated activities, which is fundamental for the establishment of what is called mutual knowledge or common ground; they must keep track of what has been established and what has been revised. Thus, these group work activities also provide opportunities for students to develop their metacognitive and self-regulated learning skills (Lou et al., 2001), which are "needed in education and can enhance learners' skills throughout their lives" (Bester, 2021, p.3).

On the aforementioned premises regarding the benefits, interactive learning processes, and individual contribution accountability in collaborative learning reported in the literature, the present study is shaped to further validate the benefits of online cooperative learning via pair/group work formats in the current context of EFL education from the learner's point of view and self-assessment on their engagement acts. To its end, the present study is specifically guided by three research questions: (1) what do EFL learners perceive as benefits of online collaborative learning? (2) how do the learners self-assess their online collaborative engagement? (3) what engagement acts do the learners perform in group work?

This investigation is helpful because very few studies have been done in the field of EFL education associated with online collaborative learning setting (which is somehow new to many students from rural areas or countries like Vietnam, where the present study was conducted; most of these students were unprepared for online learning), and pragmatically, it is of some interests to EFL teachers when applying online-collaborative learning in their specific working routines.

The following sections of this paper are presented in the order of (i) literature review (to further address the theoretical framework for the present study), (ii) method (which consists of participants and class setting; instruments; data collection and analysis procedures), followed by (iii) results and discussion, and (iv) the conclusion of major points summarized, limitations and potential research developments on relevant issues. The paper ends with a reference list and an appendix.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given that it is one of the prominent features of the communicative approach, cooperative learning has been widely implemented in EFL classrooms around the world. It is now generally acknowledged that this type of instructional approach provides learners many benefits of developing both academic and social skills (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Slavin, 1988), highly desirable in the community and the workplace because new organizational structures in the 21st-century workplace rely on team-based projects (Barron, 2000). Cooperative learning provides EFL learners with ample opportunity to promote verbal communication and help practice and enhance the target language interactively. As Zhong (2021) noted, "In recent years, there has been a paradigm shift in education and more emphasis is placed on the significant role of social interactions and interactive dialoguing in the process of learning and knowledge construction" (p.79). As a result,

for several past decades, a large body of research on collaborative learning has been conducted among EFL learners across the countries, especially in those with little English use in ordinary social discourse outside the classroom (e.g., Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2015; Chen & Hapgood, 2019; Do & Le, 2019; Dobao, 2014; García Mayo & Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2015; Pladevall-Ballester & Vraciu, 2020; Polat, Sezer, & Atis-Akyol, 2022; Sundararajan et al., 2018). Most of these studies confirmed overall benefits of collaborative learning. For instance, the study by Alfares (2017) discovered that group work benefited English learners from Saudi Arabia in cognitive, emotional and motivational aspects. A survey among English majors by Do and Le (2019) found that group work enhanced English communication, especially speaking-listening skills, and cultivated soft skills. Likewise, surveying 165 EFL students (freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior) from a university in Afghanistan, the study by Katawazai and Saidalvi (2020) showed the positive attitudes expressed by the target students towards collaborative learning strategies. Recently, Polat et al. (2022), using small, and large group mind mapping activities with the themes of social skills, observed that collaborative learning improved the social skills of pre-schoolers from Turkey.

However, concerning the shortcomings of collaborative learning, the study by Taqi and Al-Nouh (2014) observed the overuse of the native language and the dominance by one member in group work performances among EFL undergraduate students in Kuwait. A qualitative investigation by Listyani (2021), in which fourteen Indonesian EFL freshmen wrote the reflections on their online writing class, found that although group/pair online collaborative learning improved their English grammar and cultivated their soft skills of sharing ideas, expressing themselves and building relationships among peers, some students confessed that they were unhappy due to the unstable internet access and a mismatch in time management as well as in language proficiency levels with group partners. In a similar vein, interviewing six Chinese-speaking learners with a good command of English and decent experience in group work learning, Wang (2021) noted that even friendship grouping format is not independent of disadvantages; there are the cases of "some students who were active speakers and spoke all the time and never listened to others" (p.145), and "not everyone cares about the quality of the conversation or solving the problems" (p.146). The drawbacks of collaborative learning were also noted by a face-to-face interview study by Hung (2019), in which conflicts between group members might occur, leading to "some students chose to keep silent and turned uncooperative, or displayed uncontrolled manners" (p.1235). Thereby, it is true that "assigning students to groups and expecting them to know how to cooperate does not ensure that this will happen. Groups often implode because they lack the interpersonal skills required to manage disagreements among group members" (Gillies, 2016, p.41). In other words, for productive cooperation in all learning situations, involved students should be appropriately conditioned; they should hold positive views and volitionally demonstrate amply coordinative behaviors/acts in group/pair interactions adhering to social and cultural norms. As Golub (1988) posited that "one must also train students to develop specific collaborative learning skills to ensure that they can work productively and harmoniously in pairs and small groups" (p.2).

Online learning – that occurs via web-based services, either synchronous, asynchronous, or blended (Timonen & Ruokamo, 2021) - is highly deemed to be the salient mode of education in the coming years worldwide, noticeably at the tertiary level, and thereby, online learning collaboration should be comprehensively re-examined because "online communication is always mediated through a machine, which implies that it is unlikely ever to be exactly the same as face-to-face interaction" (Council of Europe, 2020, p.84) and "many teachers still assign students to work collaboratively despite the pandemic Covid because cooperative learning, including group work, can give many benefits to students" (Listyani, 2021, p.308). Timonen and Ruokamo (2021)

also assert, "students should have the right to gain the knowledge and skills required for their future professions not just in traditional learning environments, but also via online learning" (p.1). Yet, online learning poses several challenges for students, which include "students may not feel comfortable to discuss and raise questions" (Pham & Tran, 2019, p.67), "more distractions and a higher tendency for procrastination" (Bast, 2021, p.7), and "lack of social interactions as well as the perceived effectiveness of online learning" (Luu, 2021, p.89).

The present study, therefore, aimed to further investigate the benefits and possible drawbacks of online learning. Additionally, multiple past studies have utilized such instrumentally-mediating tasks in collaborative learning classes such as mind mapping (Polat et al., 2022; Sundararajan et al., 2018), picture-based tasks (Azkarai & Imaz Agirre, 2015; García Mayo & Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2015; Pladevall-Ballester & Vraciu, 2020), paragraph/essay writing or dictogloss (Chen & Hapgood, 2019; Dobao, 2014; Hilliker & Yol, 2022; Kim & McDonough, 2008; Kopinska & Azkarai, 2020; Saadat & Zahed Alavi, 2020; Soozandehfar & Sahragard, 2015). The present study attempted to implement an English-Vietnamese translation-plus-written summary task, which has yet to be reported in the relevant literature. Moreover, apart from regular courses of English language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, etc.), English-Vietnamese translation courses are embedded as either compulsory or optional in all English-major training programs for bachelor of arts degrees, typically lasting four years throughout colleges or universities in Vietnam.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS AND CLASS SETTING

The present study involved 76 EFL third-year undergraduates, 25 males and 51 females, studying at a local university in the Mekong Delta region, Vietnam. The participants' ages ranged between 21 and 22 at the research time, the academic year 2021–2022. They all share Vietnamese as the mother tongue and their EFL proficiency is of approximately upper-intermediate level because for being admitted into this university they had passed a compulsory entrance exam, in which one of the exam papers was to test their English proficiency level of lower-intermediate and at the research time they all completed three years majoring in English language full-time of their four-year undergraduate training program. On completion, their English proficiency level is supposed to be advanced (Vietnamese Prime Minister, 2008; Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training, 2010). These EFL majored students come from different parts of their home provinces in the Mekong Delta and officially registered in one of the online two-credit courses of English translation regularly scheduled by the university. The researcher of the present study taught these English translation courses. Thus, it is convenient for the researcher to collect data in this case as a convenience sampling technique because this participant sample represented the population of over five hundred English majors at the university. As Bhattacherjee (2012) defined that a convenience sampling technique is applied when "a sample is drawn from that part of the population that is close to hand, readily available" (p.69).

Each online translation course lasted fifteen weeks with a 100-minute session per week. In each session, the participants were required to work in groups of two or three. At times they were allowed to freely choose their group members, and at the other times the researcher assigned their group members to diversify groupings, i.e. participants could work adaptably with a variety of classmates. During each session, they were assigned to listen to either one English audio recording

or one video lasting, approximately for 2 – 3 minutes each. All the audio and video recordings were prepared by the researcher and already approved by the Faculty Authorities (see Appendix for a sample audio tapescript). Managing a robust engagement amount by students attending the session, the researcher made sure that these target-language-input recordings were new to all or most of them by playing it once in class and enquiring about the participants' recognition on the recording input; the results showed that all the recording input for the whole course was completely new to them. Participants all worked on their own within intra-group members via the school online system and their smartphones or home computers/laptops, but they could consult the dictionary for the meanings of English vocabulary and the researcher for task support. In every single class session, since they had experienced no online group work in a translation class, detailed directions on the tasks, task durations, the number of phases, work requirements in each phase, grouping types, and inter-member communication principles/strategies were provided by the researcher before students started their group work, especially on the first and second sessions to familiarize them with the assigned task and ensure its efficiency. Accordingly, for Phase 1, students worked individually, listening/watching the given recording, making sense of the target language input, and generating the initial translation for about 15 minutes. In Phase 2, group work lasted approximately 30 minutes, where students compared, shared their individual translations, and discussed in details to produce a joint Vietnamese translation and an English summary at hand. All discussion group works were audio-recorded and then uploaded on the school system by the students themselves, which as required showcased group members' attendance and contribution in each of the class sessions. Then, the rest of the session with follow-up activities right after group work discussions and their recordings uploaded, i.e. Phase 3, was allocated for only some of the groups since the class time was limited in each session and not enough for all groups. At this point, students presented their mutual works and the researcher's feedback as well as whole-class discussions extended with both English and Vietnamese used, during which any student in the class could contribute to the discussion relating to the assigned task. The final phase also served as a window for the researcher to observe the students' reactions to group work activities and detect any possible arising conflicts as well. Additionally, from the social-psychological perspective, the phase made a sensible room for the researcher to explicitly acknowledge the participants' mutual learning accomplishments no matter how qualified the outputs were before the session closed, implicitly triggering their curiosities about the coming assignments. The figure below manifests the procedure of what took place during each session:

The lead-in
Setting the context in order to orient the students with what to be done

Phase 1: Individual input exploration
Students individually and consciously make sense of the assigned input by listening or watching the input, pooling their current resources of life experience and linguistic knowledge in both English and Vietnamese to comprehend the input contents and generate an initial Vietnamese translation equivalent to the English input designated

Phase 2: Group work
Intra-group members sharing initial translations, negotiating, detecting and correcting peers' possible errors/inaccuracies, proofreading/editing, at times referring back to the English input for clarifications/point arguments, and ultimately to produce a jointly final translation, followed by a mutual summary in English

Phase 3: Whole class follow-up activities
A couple of groups present their Vietnamese translations and English summaries; intergroup members provide comments; teacher gives feedback, further possible discussions; acknowledges learning accomplishments
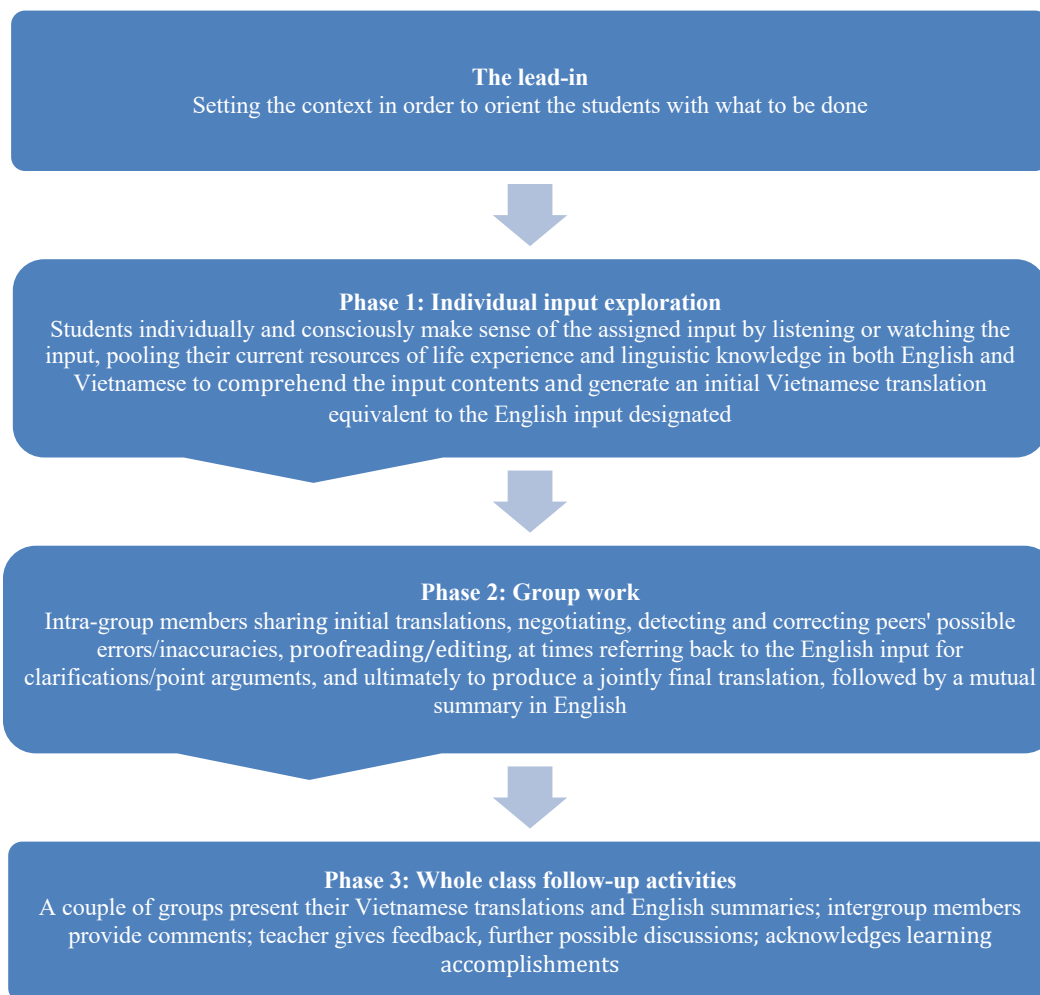
FIGURE 1. An online translation class model

INSTRUMENTS

Following the previous literature concerning the benefits of collaborative learning (Barron, 2000; Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Slavin, 1988; Timonen & Ruokamo, 2021; Zhong, 2021), as well as the ones on engagement acts in group work defined by Council of Europe (2020), the researcher developed a questionnaire to suit the participants' specific learning needs in the present study. According to the Council of Europe (2020), a collaborative language learner takes two lines of engagement acts in group work. In *collaborating to construct meaning* as a group member, his/her interactions include "cognitively framing collaborative tasks by deciding on aims, processes, and steps; co-constructing ideas/solutions; asking others to explain their thinking and identifying inconsistencies in their thought processes; summarizing the discussion and deciding on next steps" (p.109). In the position of *facilitating collaborative interaction with peers*, a language learner may perform collaborative participation by consciously managing one's roles and contributions to group communication such as helping to review key points and consider or define next steps; using turn-taking to balance contributions from other group members with their contributions; and raising questions to move the discussion forward in a productive way.

After having been reviewed by two EFL teacher colleagues and piloted among twenty students from the target population for its content validity and to ensure that the respondents could fully understand and complete the questionnaire effortlessly as well as its acceptable reliability. The obtained score from the reliability test α=.820 run by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The final questionnaire version was structured under two key components: (1) perceived benefits of online collaborative learning work with five subcomponents, and (2) self-assessed engagement acts in online group work with two subcomponents as follows:

TABLE 1. Structure of the questionnaire

Components	Subcomponents	Number of indicative items (Total=27)
(1) Perceived benefits of online collaborative learning work	Global benefits	3
	Future employment benefits	4
	Cognitive benefits	5
	Communicative benefits	3
	Social skill benefits	5
(2) Self-assessed engagement acts in online group work	Interaction facilitation	3
	Knowledge-building contribution	4

In this questionnaire, all the items were attached to a four-option format, which the respondent chose one option 1=False, 2=Rather false; 3=Rather true; *or* 4=True. This option format was applied instead of the one from *strongly agreement to strongly disagreement* because most of the questionnaire items as seen below addressed the respondent's behavior after completing the translation course, such as *Online collaborative work enhances my cooperative strategies* and *Online collaborative work trains my adaptability.* The questionnaire was instrumentally utilized to gain answers to the research questions (1) and (2). Meanwhile, for the third research question, i.e., (3) what engagement acts do students perform in group work?, the researcher opted to analyze all the uploaded audio-recordings in the third week of the translation course involved as representative of what was typically unfolding in the course of Phase 2, where group work activities were intentionally and comprehensively shaped. Although the whole course progression was recorded by the school's online learning system, the third week's recordings were selected because by that week the participants got accustomed to working online and also because in this week they were allowed to choose their partners, which was deemed to ease and yield the maximal volume of interactions among peers. The results of the recordings investigation empirically delineated group work acts among the target students in the online translation class setting, modifying what has been found from the questionnaire data.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

For ethical issues, before conducting the study, the researcher applied for written permission from the Faculty and involved students. The researcher clearly explained the survey purpose, questionnaire contents, and the uses of group work discussion recordings over the course for the present study. Also, the researcher ensured that these recordings would be accessed only by himself and the students involved unless further notifications were made by the school authorities or otherwise specified, and that the study results would be reported anonymously without any impact on the participants' current course grades.

An e-questionnaire form was delivered to all the EFL students enrolling in the researcher's online translation course at the final class session. It took them around 10 minutes to complete the form. All 76 students returned the questionnaire form at the end of the final class session. For data analysis, first, a reliability test was run to check the questionnaire reliability using the software of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) with the result of the Cronbach coefficient alpha computation α=.873. Since Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient normally ranges between 0 and 1, thus with α=.873 the questionnaire used in the present study was reliable and valid for analyzing data in detail. Then, descriptive statistics tests on the data were conducted with five mean scores levels: Very high =3.6 – 4; High =3.2 – 3.59; Upper-medium =2.5 - 3.19; Medium =2 - 2.49; and Low =1.0 – 1.99.

Regarding the posted audio-recordings by students, with ethical commitments in mind, that is, no third party was allowed to access these raw data as noted above, the researcher handled them by himself. Upon meticulously scrutinizing and manually transcribing the recordings, one by one comprehensively and iteratively when needed, and guided by previous relevant studies, the researcher coded two working categories of group work engagement acts applied exclusively in the present study, namely, *interaction facilitation* and *knowledge-building contribution*. These interactional acts not only provided empirical evidence of the participants' engagements in group activities but were expected to unveil the types of verbal acts frequently used in the process of completing a translation task among EFL Vietnamese-speaking learners, which had yet to be well-known in the relevant literature of EFL education as far as the researcher observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results concerning three research questions: (1) What do EFL learners perceive as benefits of online collaborative learning? (2) How do the learners self-assess their online collaborative engagement? (3) What engagement acts do the learners perform in group work?

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE BENEFITS OF ONLINE COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The answers to research question 1 were obtained from the first half of the questionnaire results, which consisted of five subcomponents as mentioned in Table 1 above, namely global benefits, future employment benefits, cognitive benefits, communicative benefits, and social benefits. The results are displayed in Table 2 below:

TABLE 2. Perceived benefits of online collaborative learning (N=76)

Subcomponents and Indicators	Mean	SD
(1) *Global benefits*	*3.71*	*.357*
1. Online collaborative work is necessary and productive during online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic.	3.83	.379
2. Online collaborative work is an essential skill for students in the 21st century.	3.70	.566
3. Online collaborative work helps train the ability to get prepared in the changing world.	3.63	.512
(2) *Future employment benefits*	*3.64*	*.363*

4. Online collaborative work is useful for my future employment.	3.87	.340
5. Online collaborative work trains my adaptability.	3.54	.621
6. Online collaborative work cultivates my ability to cope with adverse situations.	3.61	.544
7. Online collaborative work helps identify my strengths and weaknesses.	3.58	.572
(3) Cognitive benefits	*3.72*	*.333*
8. Online collaborative work facilitates various views on an issue.	3.76	.428
9. Online collaborative discussion promotes my critical thinking skills.	3.80	.401
10. Online collaborative work improves my cognitive skills.	3.62	.610
11. Online collaborative work develops my attitude of respecting alternative opinions.	3.75	.520
12. Online group work enhances my learning autonomy.	3.68	.594
(4) Communicative benefits	*3.68*	*.348*
13. Online collaborative work trains my ability to politely and attentively listen to others' communications.	3.87	.340
14. Online collaborative work trains my ability to communicate online appropriately with other people.	3.74	.472
15. Online collaborative work improves my ability to negotiate with others.	3.45	.737
(5) Social benefits	*3.56*	*.413*
16. Online collaborative work improves my leadership skills.	3.61	.591
17. Online collaborative work trains my ability to partake in social activities.	3.46	.642
18. Online collaborative work hones my ability to get appropriately and beneficially socialized.	3.63	.562
19. Online collaborative work trains my ability to successfully cooperate for mutual achievements.	3.74	.526
20. Online collaborative work enhances my cooperative strategies.	3.39	.713
Scale total:	*3.66*	*.294*

With the mean score of M=3.66 out of 4 for the scale total and small size of standard deviation SD=.294 from table 2, it indicates that the participants acknowledged the values of collaborative learning via online collaborative work at a very high level. All the five subcomponents of global, future employment, cognitive, communicative, and social benefits received roughly the same mean scores of 3.71, 3.64, 3.72, 3.68, and 3.56, respectively, with the cognitive benefits topping the list and the social benefits standing at the bottom. Although it is a virtual exchange, online collaborative group work also benefits the learner's cognitive skills via their interactive actions of receiving, mentally processing, exercising their cognitive agencies, and independently discussing diversified opinions/ideas or information provided by partners. These cognitive processes are bound to make learning occur, knowledge acquired, critical thinking skills sharpened, and autonomy generated, which reasonably accounts for the learner's increased academic achievements documented in the previous studies in the EFL education and beyond (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Lou et al., 2001; Zhong, 2021). Underlining the essential role of critical thinking at the tertiary education level, Breivik (2016) posited that "The development of critical thinking is an important rationale for higher education and plays a central role, both as a goal for and as a prerequisite of successful online discussions" (p.5).

As found in the recordings, the participants spoke both English and Vietnamese while performing the assigned task, which will be reported in Table 4 below. The present study argues that it is the task of trans-languaging between English and Vietnamese from English to Vietnamese and vice versa iteratively, both verbally and non-verbally, resulting in a jointly summarized textual product and oral presentation as required in this translation course that conductively mediated and

ad hoc drove the participants to advance their verbal communication and social act strategies, namely deliberating, communicating, listening, responding, negotiating, cooperating, socializing, leading/supporting others, etc. This mostly helps justify the high rating of the participants regarding the communicative and social benefits, which echoes the similar findings reported in previous research (Polat et al, 2022; Zhong, 2021). However, the present study somehow diverged from the past inquiries in that it further explored the participants' perceptions on the benefits of online collaborative interactions regarding future employment/job requirements and the 21st century's skills. As seen from Table 2, although the five subcomponents gained almost the same mean scores, the results showed a high level of the participants' rating on both the global benefits (M=3.71) and future employment benefits (M=3.64). As a result, the participants in the present study appeared to well perceive the necessity and comprehensive benefits of online collaborative learning work from mutual knowledge construction, critical thinking, social skills to productive adaptability in the 21st-century market world. Thereby, these positive results validate the benefits of collaborative learning in the virtual setting from learners' viewpoint. Additionally, the results signify a necessary condition for the participants to get involved and actively engaged in the course task assigned by the researcher. The next section addresses their self-assessed engagement acts.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: EFL LEARNERS' SELF-ASSESSMENT ON ONLINE COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT ACTS

The answers to research question 2 were obtained from the second half of the questionnaire results, which comprised two subcomponents of (1) interaction facilitation and (2) knowledge building contribution. The results are presented in Table 3 below:

TABLE 3. Self-assessed engagement acts in online collaborative learning (N=76)

Subcomponents and Indicators	Mean	SD
(1) *Interaction facilitation*	*3.10*	*.547*
21. In online collaborative work, I usually make decisions and suggest what to do next.	3.24	.563
22. In online collaborative work, I am usually an active moderator (facilitating other group members).	3.12	.783
23. In online collaborative work, I usually invite partners to express themselves.	2.96	.756
(2) *Knowledge-building contribution*	*3.53*	*.344*
24. I actively make contributions to group work.	3.18	.725
25. In online collaborative work, I usually acknowledge good ideas and contributions from peers.	3.29	.607
26. In online collaborative work, I usually comment on peers' opinions and contributions.	3.78	.419
27. In online collaborative sessions, I get prepared to take in comments, suggestions from peers.	3.88	.325
Self-assessment scale total	*3.34*	*.372*

As seen in Table 3, the statistic questionnaire result of the total scale M=3.34 with a narrow SD=.372 shows a high level of self-assessment acts in online collaborative learning by the participants. However, between the two subcomponents, knowledge-building contribution (M=3.53) appeared to surpass the other subcomponent (M=3.10, interaction facilitation). This result clearly reveals most of the participants in this specific case thought that they were not in the position of being a very good initiator or moderator in reciprocal activities, but as found in the

recordings and presented in the next section they coordinated well by getting prepared to make contributions, take in comments, suggestions from peers and respond to peers' contributions, i.e., they demonstrated an expected attitude, engagement, and behaviors in online collaborative learning. The participants all completed their assignments successfully on a session-to-session learning basis, both when they chose their partners and when the researcher randomly grouped them. Furthermore, also via the examined recordings, unlike what has been reported in some previous investigations (Hung, 2019; Listyani, 2021; Wang, 2021) concerning the drawbacks of collaborative learning, the researcher did not detect any inter-member conflicts or extreme problems among the participants in their handling English audio/video input into Vietnamese translation and creating a textual product of English summary as directed. The biggest problem they complained about as found in the follow-up activities of Phase 3 was the unstable internet connection because many of them joined the course during the Covid-19 pandemic while still staying at home in rural or remote areas, where the internet system occasionally failed. In other words, leaving the internet connection aside, once learners have highly appreciated the benefits of collaborative learning together with ample guidance provided by in-charge teachers, their learning engagements are mostly observed, and drawbacks inherent in group work are minimized or warded off, which is highly likely to facilitate learning and academic growth as a result.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: EFL LEARNERS' ENGAGEMENT ACTS IN GROUP WORK

This section reports the participants' engagement acts in performing online group work assignments via their posted group work discussion recordings from the third week's meeting session of the translation course. A total of 28 group work recordings were collected. Table 4 below provides categories and examples of group work engagement acts, while Table 5 presents the statistic details as follows.

TABLE 4. Categories of group work engagement acts

Categories	Indicative acts	Examples from the selected data
Interaction facilitation	(1) Navigating work procedure/steps	- *Trước hết bọn mình nghe lại lần nữa, rồi dịch ra tiếng Việt nhe* [Let's listen to the recording again, then translate into Vietnamese] (Group 18)
	(2) Repeating oneself or peers' sayings	- *Mình nói câu thứ 2 đó* [I'm mentioning the second sentence in the passage] (Group 11)
	(3) Referring back to the assigned input	- *Nó là "well-educated graduates" đúng không*? [It's well-educated graduates, right?] (Group 20)
	(4) Summarizing and moving forwards	- *Thống nhất đoạn 1 như vậy, mình chuyển sang đoạn 2 nhe* [We have agreed on the first paragraph, let's move to the second one] (Group 24)
	(5) Assessing/Complimenting peers	- *Mình thấy dịch như vậy là hay rồi đó* [I think that's a good translation] (Group 27)
	(6) Inviting peers to contribute	- *Còn bạn dịch thế nào?* [How did you translate?] (Group 15)
Knowledge-building contribution	(1) Offering translation	- *Để tôi dịch trước cho đoạn này tôi nghe rõ* [Let's me translate first this part because I got it well] (Group 4)
	(2) Detecting errors/inconsistencies in arguments	- *Chỗ đó mình nghĩ bạn dịch chưa chính xác lắm* [I don't think that's correct] (Group 30)
	(3) Seeking corrections/comments from peers	- *Không biết dịch như vậy có ổn chưa?* [Is that translation Ok?] (Group 9)

(4) Providing reasons/accounts to argue	- *Nhưng ở đây nó là danh từ mà* [But here it is a noun] (Group 17)	
(5) Suggesting alternative translations/solutions	- *Mình nghĩ nên thay thế là "tích cực" thì hay hơn* [I think we should replace it with "active"] (Group 22)	
(6) Seeking clarifications/modifications from peers	- *Vậy là bạn có đảo cấu trúc câu phải không*? [You reserve the sentential structure, right?] (Group 25)	

TABLE 5. Empirical group work engagement acts

Categories	Indicative acts	Tokens counted	% in subscale	% in the whole scale	Ranking
Interaction facilitation (IF)	(IF1) Navigating work procedure/steps	84	9.05	4.36	10
	(IF2) Repeating oneself or peers' sayings	285	30.71	14.82	2
	(IF3) Referring back to the input	329	35.45	17.10	1
	(IF4) Summarizing and moving forwards	68	7.32	3.53	12
	(IF5) Assessing/Complimenting peers	87	9.37	4.52	8
	(IF6) Inviting peers to contribute	75	8.08	3.90	11
	Subscale total:	***928***	100%	**48.25**	
Knowledge-building contribution (KC)	(KC1) Offering translations/summaries	210	21.10	10.92	5
	(KC2) Detecting errors/inconsistencies in arguments	87	8.74	4.52	8
	(KC3) Seeking corrections/comments from peers	105	10.55	5.46	7
	(KC4) Providing reasons/accounts to argue	250	25.12	13.00	3
	(KC5) Suggesting alternative translations/solutions	112	11.25	5.82	6
	(KC6) Seeking clarifications/modifications from peers	231	23.21	12.01	4
	Subscale total:	***995***	100%	**51.74**	
	Scale total	***1,923***		100%	

As seen in Table 5, the subscale total tokens of interaction facilitation blended by six indicative acts with IF3 and IF2 topping the list account for 48.25% of the whole scale total, which mostly equals the other subscale's percentage, that is knowledge-building contribution of 51.74% made up by six indicative acts of differing percentages. Consequently, this empirical finding identifies the vital weight of IF acts by the participants in the procedure of handling their English-Vietnamese translation and written summary task applied in the present study. This is largely because while interacting they had to iterate the acts of IF2 and IF3, thus both dominating the whole scale of engagement acts. These two prevailing acts are essential because the participants had to collaborate on a unit-by-unit basis, i.e., sentence, clause, phrase, and even single words as well as related grammatical items of the audio/video text-based input to mutually make sense of it thoroughly, followed by generating an equivalent Vietnamese text. While performing the assigned task, at times they had to consult the dictionary in the cases of unknown/new vocabulary and select appropriate lexical meanings provided in the dictionary and based on audio/video textual contexts. As a result, the two acts of IF2 and IF3 appeared to facilitate group interactions to deliberate over the textual input assigned by listening to or watching iteratively; that is, the participants were more exposed to the target language, spending more time on discussing linguistic issues (Dobao, 2014; Kopinska & Azkarai, 2020) before coming to mutual agreement. Thus, collaborative task-driven engagement and learning opportunities explicitly emerged and maintained until the task was jointly completed no matter how decent it appeared to be. This is evident in the present study by

the fact that all 28 groups attending the third week's class session posted their group discussions recorded and collaborative task outputs in written summaries.

The dominating IF3 presence has not been reported in past relevant research mostly because the target language input in the present study played a critical role for subsequent activities impacting the three-phase task as seen above. Meanwhile, the second high-percentage IF2 with 14.82% of the scale total is aligned with the frequently-used *repetition strategy* by two EFL Iranian pairs in Saadat and Zahed Alavi (2020)'s study, which investigated their discussions on jointly doing their 8-paragraph-writing assignments weekly during an English-writing course. This prevalent strategy has also been reported in other past inquiries in language education (García Mayo & Lázaro-Ibarrola, 2015; Lázaro-Ibarrola & Azpilicueta-Martínez, 2015; Pladevall-Ballester & Vraciu, 2020). From a social perspective, *repetition* signifies the learner's engagement in what is going on. In addition to repetition, the learners in the present study used other social skills to contribute to building knowledge reciprocally via KC4 providing reasons/accounts to argue, KC6 seeking clarifications/modifications from peers, and KC1 offering translations/summaries, which account for more than 10% each of the scale total. These social acts more or less match those addressed in previous studies (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2010; Pladevall-Ballester & Vraciu, 2020; Saadat & Zahed Alavi, 2020; Zhong, 2021; among other ones), which conditioned the learners not only to fulfill the learning task but implicitly cultivating their social and cognitive skills. As a result, the empirical investigation provided in this section backs up the pedagogical values of online collaborative learning exercised by translation courses for EFL learners.

CONCLUSION

The present study implemented online collaborative learning in English translation courses to EFL learners from a local university, South of Vietnam during the Covid-19 pandemic. Surveying these learners at the end of the course via a questionnaire and analyzing their group discussion recordings uncover that the learners highly appreciated online collaborative learning via group work because they perceived that it is beneficial to their future life, career, cognition, and social communication strategies. Their positive views on collaborative learning benefits are deemed to engage them in online group work activities while interacting with peers to complete shared assignments by using a range of social acts/strategies. It is believed that these interactions make learning occur, knowledge acquired, and social skills reinforced by the learners, which is worthwhile preparing them for their future life. As a result, the present study validates the robust benefits of online collaborative learning as long as the learner's mindset is decently cultivated by the teacher's sufficient guidance and internet connection is well-ensured. It is suggested that collaborative learning can potentially be applied in wider subject courses of EFL training programs other than primary ones and the model introduced in the present study is an alternative. However, since it only used the questionnaire survey with a non-random sample, the present study can hardly be generalized. Thus, future research should contain some further type of empirical data such as measuring and comparing the learner's translation product quality at the outset and end of the course. Another way is tracking the patterns of interactive behaviors of the high-achieving learner group as compared with those of the low-achieving learner group. These expanded studies will not only offer further understandings about online collaborative learning but also suggest effective ways of instruction in language education.

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APPENDIX

A SAMPLE AUDIO-RECORDING TAPESCRIPT FOR GROUP WORK IN THE CLASSROOM (WEEK 3)

Lecture: One of the great controversies in education now is the type of curriculum to offer at universities. In the 1960s and 1970s, many universities offered courses that students were interested in but which had no practical value. Courses such as Tibetan Buddhist chanting had no practical application in the workplace. In the 1980s, Harvard University led the way in reforming its curriculum by making a strict core program that all students had to follow. It has aspects of many disciplines, including arts, languages, and sciences. No course is considered more important than another. All are considered necessary to produce well-educated graduates.

Reference A: I think music and art should have the same value as other courses. Firstly, they are part of our society. Appreciating music and art can make you well-rounded. On the other hand, if all we studied were math and science, we'd be like robots and never appreciate the beauty of our world. Secondly, studies have shown that people with comprehensive educations are more valuable in the workforce. Many universities now require students to take a core curriculum before they pick a major. This gives them some knowledge in many areas and provides them with flexibility in choosing their careers. For these reasons, I believe art and music should have the same value as other courses.

Reference B: I believe art and music shouldn't have the same value as other courses. First of all, they have no practical use in the real world. Simply put, no one cares if I can play the piano or draw well when I apply for a job, so art and music shouldn't be considered important classes. Another important thing is that some people have no talent for art and music, so giving grades in these classes is unfair. If a student with little artistic or musical talent got a bad grade in a class, it might affect his chances of getting into college or even graduating from college. Therefore, for these reasons, I think art and music shouldn't have the same value as other courses.

[*Source*: Putlack, M. A., Link, W., & Poirier, S. (2008, 195-196). *How to master skills for the TOEFL iBT speaking*. Darakwon, Inc.]