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Article

Roles-Based Engagement in Collaborative Online Discussions to Promote EFL Speaking

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines students' perceptions of role-based engagement in collaborative online discussions to promote English as a foreign language (EFL) speaking. For this reason, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 students and one educator. The results showed that teachers applied three basic educators' collaborative competencies (ECC) during online discussions. Thus, group activities are evident through the following: speaking skills (peer grammar repetition and peer pronunciation correction), cognitive boosting (criticizing and confirming specific opinions), social interaction (praising group accomplishments and help-seeking problem-solving), and collaborative skills. The study suggests more research into role-based discussions that occur on the spot or without teachers planning ahead, open-ended speaking diagnostic tasks, designs for online assessment and evaluation of speaking rubrics, fluency-oriented speaking tasks, and technology-assisted peer-learning assessments.

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Roles-based engagement, collaborative learning, online discussion, speaking EFL

Introduction

The use of collaborative learning strategies in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) has been extensively studied. For instance, Babiker (2018) proposed that an integral component of the educator preparation program should involve both instruction and hands-on practice for students. González-Lloret (2020) concluded that effective course design and teamwork are crucial elements in education. Similarly, Koç (2018) delved into the positive impact of encouraging group activities on students' collaborative skills. Parallel to this, Fatimah (2019) used the mantle of experts to include students in group projects to help them feel less anxious as they practiced speaking EFL in class. Moreover, Chen et al. (2021) and Le et al. (2018) contended that by facilitating their virtual reality context, they can improve their active behavior and enhance their interactions and self-efficacy to boost the growth of their speaking.

According to empirical data, educators employ technical strategies to improve student speaking and the implementation of collaborative learning, starting with traditional (face-to-face) in-class collaboration (Wang & Chen, 2012) and progressing all the way up to blended learning collaboration (synchronous and asynchronous). For instance, Al-Samarraie & Saeed (2018); Butarbutar et al. (2023b); Çakiroğlu & Erdemir (2019); Magen-Nagar & Shonfeld (2018); Molinillo et al. (2018); Sun &Yuan (2018). Supporting small-group online collaboration through educator feedback on academic assignments, social interaction, and learning content (Daradoumis et al., 2006; Macdonald, 2003; Redmond & Lock, 2006) They emphasized that online collaborative learning can be used as a substitute for evaluation to help students improve their language, social, and academic performance (Hossain et al., 2022).

Additionally, even though it is crucial to promote students' active participation in their learning, the educator's feedback also plays a role (Willis & Willis, 2007), and assistance is required. The goal of this study is to fill this gap. Educators frequently select subjects for group discussions to facilitate conversation

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among students and promote their consciousness or understanding of the need to collaborate (Wu & Wang, 2023). However, occasionally, educators gave them free rein to select their own topics. Therefore, free themes may appeal to their past knowledge. This is in line with Vygotsky (1978)'s ground-breaking constructivist learning theory. He claimed that pupils will be more receptive and interested when they have prior background, experience, and information relevant to the topic of conversation (Chen & Hwang, 2022; Manabe et al., 2021).

Group members must work together on an online discussion forum. When all participants are involved, a debate flows smoothly and is more productive flows smoothly and is more productive (Sadeghi & Kardan, 2016). In some cases, roles help raise group members' awareness (Martin & Rose, 2003) when this does not happen naturally or automatically. Benne & Sheats (2020, 1948) effectively defined the term "growth and production of a group" to characterize the necessary member role in light of this concept. They emphasized that to create and maintain effective focus group activities, members' roles are a requirement. Consequently, they divided the roles of functional group members into three categories: group tasks (Vandommele et al., 2018), group creation and maintenance, and individual function roles. This is congruent with Willis & Willis's (2007) viewpoint that task-based learning is a teaching and learning methodology. As a result, they give students the roles they are assigned, as well as tasks. Simultaneously, Butarbutar (2021) investigated how, although task-based, this approach to teaching EFL speaking has its own difficulties.

To gain a better understanding, the current study modifies the group task role developed by Benne & Sheats (1948). Each group member plays a part in starting, organizing, and facilitating information to address the issue at hand. In this regard, there are two types of roles for group tasks: (1) starters or contributors who pioneer group activities and team problem-solving. (2) Information seeker: Looking for information on the subjects being discussed and clarifying it. (3) Opinion seeker/giver: Recommendations based on what the group is worth. (4) Evaluation/feedback provider: Assesses the group's work and offers helpful criticism. (5) Decision maker or conclusion: As an individual representation, comes to a better overall conclusion. (6) Uploader into YouTube, WAG, and Zoom: Upload the work of the group into a digital space to be shared in the classroom; and (7) Speaker or Narrator: The participant whose responsibility is to speak up or provide narration when the group business is debated and resolved cooperatively (figure 2).

Role-based collaboration during online discussion to encourage speaking EFL is not well recognized, save for some previously stated technical solutions for collaborative learning implementation. Additionally, computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) has been widely used to advance other language skills but less so for speaking abilities. Therefore, the goal of this study was to fill this knowledge gap. Therefore, to facilitate our understanding, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How can educators use collaborative role-based competencies to promote EFL speaking?
2. How effectively can online collaborative role-based learning foster EFL speaking skills?
3. What exactly do participants in role-based online discussions do in groups?
4. How does role-based online discussion appear to students?

Method

Research Design

The study was conducted using a qualitative case study that was exploratory and pertinent to the objectives of the study. As a result, Yin (2009) defined a case study as a research study whose goal is to determine the research questions or methods to be applied in a subsequent research study, which may or may not be a case study. The boundaries for each instance must be determined early in the research process, such as in classroom behavior. Additionally, he adds that case studies offer a special illustration of actual people in

actual circumstances, making it possible to comprehend how and why this happened and resulting in a rich and vivid description of events.

As described above, the current study was the initial phase of an investigation to gain a fresh understanding of the phenomena through a thorough exploratory process. We referred to this as a case study because the features of the participants might be particular to the academic environment and cannot be extrapolated to other contexts.

Data Collection

The study was set up and carried out through a WhatsApp group (WAG), which is pertinent to the research title and research questions designed in the previous section. Educator and students made the most of the WAG's program by utilizing chat rooms and video conferencing. Regarding moral concerns, the study participants were chosen voluntarily and without compensation. According to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Universitas Musamus Merauke, a letter of authorization must be given to the faculty staff before any ethical research concerns may be addressed. After receiving written approval from the dean of the Faculty of Educator Preparation and Education, exploration took place. A purposively sampled technique was used to collect the research sample. They selected WAG for this instance because they used it as a location for speaking training. Additionally, educators frequently use WAG to share instructional tasks.

The study used a semi-structured interview guide, observation, an online focus group discussion (FGD), field notes, and documents as instruments to assist the researcher in data collection. Hence, the researcher used the educator's daily and monthly reports and the student's progress control card as instruments for completing document instrumentation. In addition, the study used relevant literature as additional references to obtain an in-depth understanding of role-based interactions during online discussions.

Participants

According to the research questions, syntactical learning is specifically demonstrated as follows: the educator divided students into four groups depending on their roles in the first meeting. These groups included information seekers and givers, opinion seekers and givers, evaluators, and feedback providers, decision-makers or conclusion uploaders on YouTube, WAG, and Zoom, as well as speakers and narrators. The 28 participants (20 females and eight males) and one female educator were included in the study. The students' ages ranged from 20 to 25. Meanwhile, the educator was above 40 years of age. She is a senior certified EFL teacher and has more than ten years of experience as a teacher.

Data Analysis

All data collected using the tools provided are analyzed thematically (theme-subthemes) (Braun et al., 2023) and interactively using interactive models (Miles et al., 2018) for the best possible data analysis. To confirm and validate the outcomes, the participants received data that concluded.

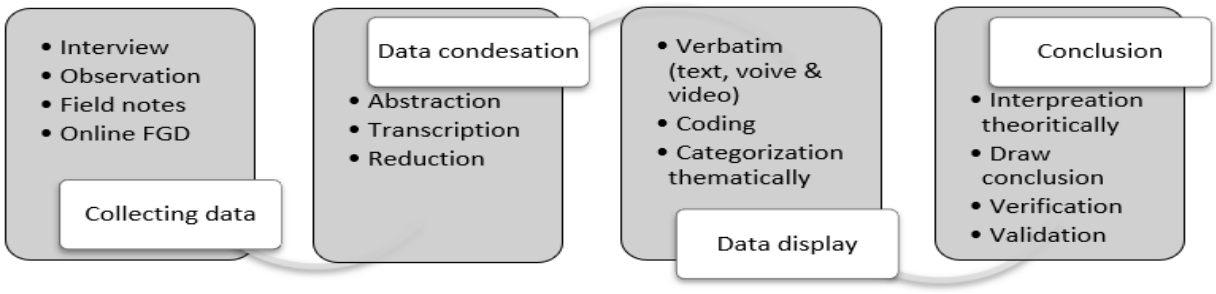

Figure 1. Interactive data analysis technique.

Similarly, researchers used people to confirm the accuracy of their findings. Consequently, researchers have not received much helpful feedback from educators. One piece of advice is that role-based online discussions (Wallwork, 1997) work best when they are centered on real-world issues that are relevant to students' past knowledge.

Limitations

Our study acknowledges several limitations that may affect its generalizability to a broader population. Firstly, the small sample size may limit the representativeness of the findings to a larger population, potentially leading to bias. Secondly, the sample characteristics in our study may not be representative of a larger population, which can impact the external validity of the study. Thirdly, the lack of an experiment and a control group may hinder the ability to establish causal relationships. Furthermore, findings from a specific case study may not be easily replicated or generalized to other settings or groups.

Results

In light of the first research question, "What are educator' competencies in implementing collaborative roles-based strategies to promote EFL speaking?" The study found that educators applied three base educators' collaboration competencies (ECC) during online discussions. These competencies include designers, facilitators, monitors, and evaluators. These competencies and expected student outcomes during online discussion implementation are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Educator' collaborative competencies

Base-ECC	Core-competencies	Sub-core competencies	Student outcomes
Designer	Designing learning objectives	Organizing students' learning styles with course materials	Students understood learning objectives
	Collaboration instructional	Defining collaborative learning	Student's collaborative awareness
	Roles-based group division	Each student is divided pertinent with each roles	Student recognizes her/his role
	Chosen topics for weekly group performances	Real-world problem, students prior both bad and good experiences, procedural text-based dialogue, up to date trending news,	Speak up more accurately, confidently, reduce anxiety due to have any prior experience to be shared in group
Facilitator	Explaining learning objectives	Giving clear instruction for online discussion	Learning objectives student's understanding
	Supporting	Providing challenging questions	Student's readiness and engagement
		Maximizing virtual venue for discussion forum such as WAG, chat room feature, Zoom Meet Application, free YouTube channel & Google Classroom	Students' engagement in online discussion venue
		Encourage student to be engaged in all chosen topics discussion	
		Recorded video performances	Students' speaking improvement Students knowing speaking performances category
Monitor& Evaluator (MONEV)	Self-monitor	Direct observation	
		Observation check lists	
		Students diary	
	Peer evaluation	Guided-book peer evaluation	
		Oral peer evaluation	
	Formative and	The evaluation was conducted in the	Students knowing their

	summative evaluation	middle and end of the semester.	speaking performances category (Fluent, Average, and Poor)
	Reflecting	Comparing intended learning goal and student's behavior	Students knowing their speaking performances category (Fluent, Average, and Poor)
		Reflective daily reports	
	Feedback provider	Informing alternative strategy for speaking fluency e.g. web-based speaking tools	
	Oral feedback	Praising, encouraging agreeing or disagreeing,	
	Written or digital feedback	"Thanks for submitting your assignment"	

Table 1 implies that educator competencies play a significant role in collaboration success through interactive student engagement. The study noted that speaking performance increased significantly due to the educator intervention to guide and control each student. Otherwise, students with an active attitude are more active, while students with a passive attitude are more passive. In this vein, educator competencies are an essential fuel for collaboration.

Apparently, in response to the second question, the current study was role-based to make student participation more interactive in an online discussion. The frame is shown in Figure 2.

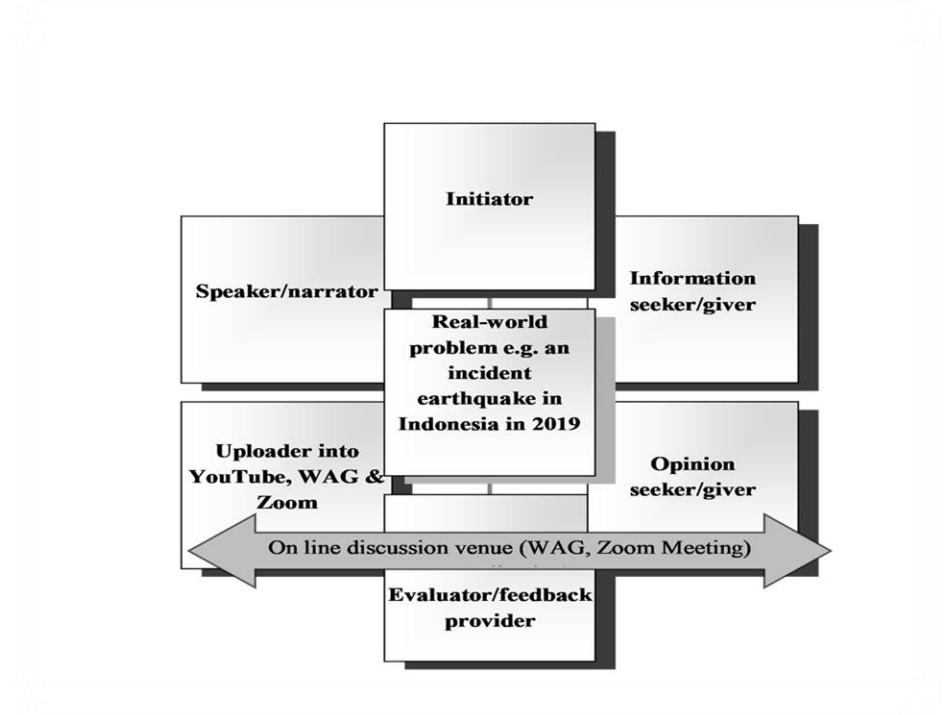

Figure 2. Roles-based online discussion

Relevant to the third research question, 'What exactly do participants in role-based online discussions do in groups?' The study's empirical evidence is clear: some activities have already been carried out, including chat rooms, discussion forums, and search, speak, and share (3S). In summary, the group activities in which students participated may be broken down into four categories, as shown in Figure 2: cognitive enhancement, social interaction, speaking abilities, and collaboration skills.

The following categorization was made: (i) speaking skills involve peer grammar repetition and peer pronunciation correction; (ii) cognitive boosting involves criticizing and confirming specific opinions; (iii)

social interaction entails praising group accomplishments and help-seeking problem solving; speaking skills involve peer grammar repetition and peer pronunciation correction; and (iv) collaborative skills involve remembering other group members' roles and responsibilities.

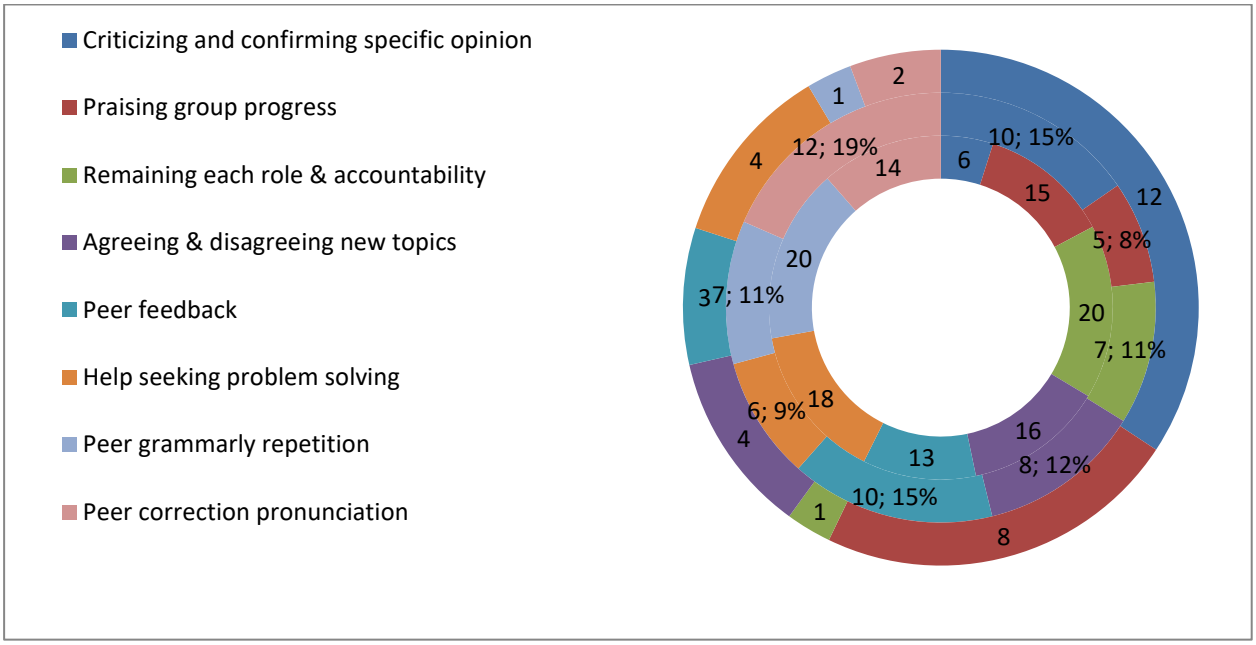

Figure 3. Evidence group activities

This issue relates to the fourth research question: How do students respond to role-based online discussions? This opportunity allowed us to categorize people's perceptions based on (a) language use and performance: [I was at ease in my job, I was encouraged to expand my vocabulary, I was encouraged to speak more fluently but with less precision, and my role had an impact on my performance.] (b) Affective and motivating elements were present [I was content to be a part of this particular group division; I felt secure since I had studied; and I found the session to be boring]. (c) Peer tutoring accommodation: [The roles of my peers allowed me to participate; I relished the challenge of my role]. Figure 4 depicts most of their perceptions and experiences.

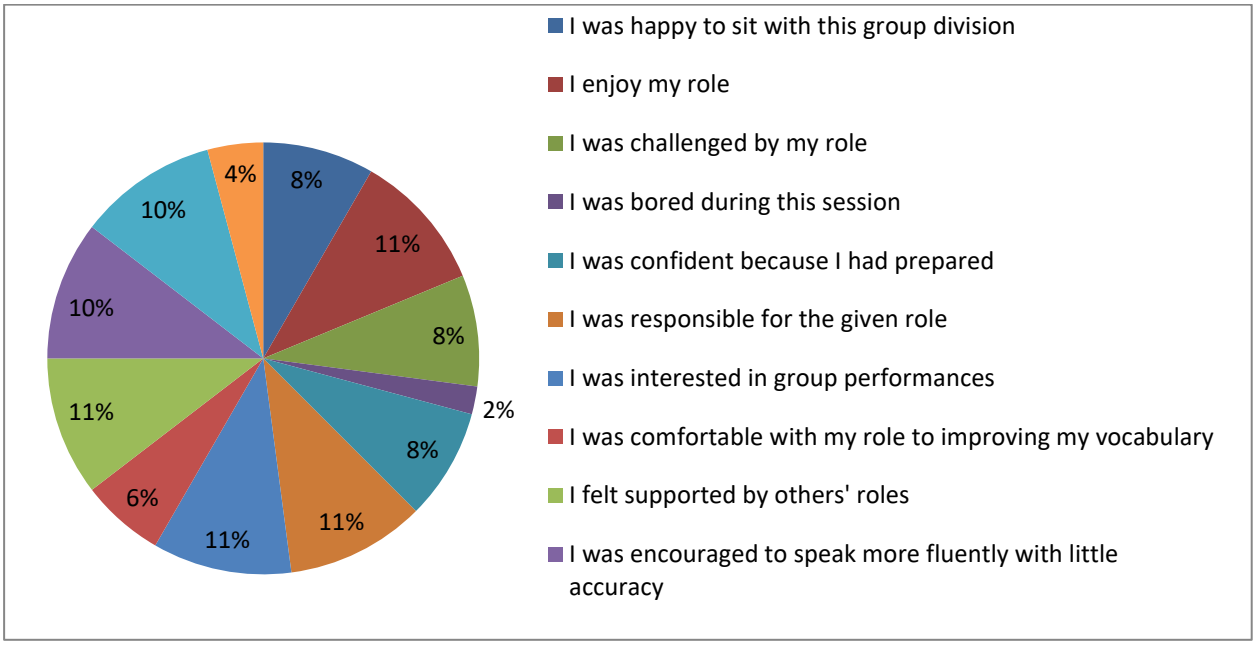

Figure 4. Students' response of roles-based collaboration

Discussion

According to the results of the FGD and interviews, the educator used three fundamental ECCs when participating in online discussions. However, they also serve the capacities of designers, facilitators, monitors, and evaluators (Butarbutar et al., 2023; Butarbutar et al., 2019; Leba et al., 2021). The study discovered that learning objectives were created by instructors and designers in accordance with the English language education foundation and core competencies of the University Musamus Merauke. Additionally, the study revealed that when educators supported students in these group activities for promotion, which included topics for weekly group performances, real-world issues, students' prior experiences (both positive and negative), procedural text-based dialogue, current trending news, and, of course, acting on group activities, their speaking EFL was more promoted, they spoke up more accurately and confidently, and they reduced anxiety due to having any prior experience to share. Similarly, Kaendler et al. (2015) noted the cognitive, collaborative, and metacognitive forms of student involvement during monitoring. In a manner similar to this, Kollar et al. (2007). used internal and external tasks to test collaboration, such as managing interpersonal connections and social interactions. Internal processes such as task management, opinion expression, discussion, and brooding continue throughout this process. According to Gillies and Boyle (2010), these crucial elements have been included to make the adoption of collaborative learning more successful. For instance, educators in collaborative classrooms must reflect on academic achievement, accountability, group projects, interpersonal skills, collaboration abilities (Butarbutar et al., 2023a), and socializing. According to Abrami et al. (2004), knowledge differentiation between user and non-user collaboration pushes educators to better understand collaboration implementation methodologies. Accordingly, Uslu and Durak (2022) claimed that planning, monitoring, and self-regulating procedures could predict learner autonomy. As a result, they emphasize the importance of group engagement in making collaborative activities relevant, as Thornbury and Slade (2006) wrote in their book that teachers play a role in arranging students' interactions in conversation. The results of the open-ended educator interviews showed that role-based strategies in online discussions could help advance speaking EFL. This approach encourages students to take a more active, responsible, and involved role in each group's performance. They were forced to speak up more than usual because they played the role of their classmates. Students were encouraged to speak with confidence while also showing respect for their roles and positions. In contrast, the findings of the educator interviews show that in group projects without role-based separation, only one or two interested students approve of the performance. This is consistent with Cetto et al. (2018) claimed that role-based systems, including message providers, takers, and matchers, are crucial for knowledge management.

According to the findings of the students' interviews, the topics selected were relevant to their prior knowledge and experiences, which encouraged them to be more talkative (Nur & Butarbutar, 2022). For instance, because each group member had personal experience with the Indonesian earthquake disaster in 2019, the initiator students' roles did not have significant difficulty setting the tone for the group's conversation. According to Stokols et al. (2008), prior knowledge, distribution power, and control have an impact on the results of collaboration. Similarly, educator design group assignments have an impact on the implementation of collaborative learning (Gillies & Boyle, 2010). Vigotsky 's (1978) learning constructivism theory contends that students' past knowledge, experience, beliefs, and insights form the foundation of learning and provides substantial support for our position in this situation. In addition, empirical evidence has shown that students actively discuss their earlier experiences. As a result, it is easy for students to speak up in the speaker or narrator role when presenting the evaluator's work. Speaker roleholders can build up a large vocabulary starting in the initiation stage. Speaking with confidence is frequently encouraged through role-based cycle repetition, vocabulary size, fluency, and correctness. According to Bailey and Nunan (2005) and Bailey and Savage (1994), students' fluency and confidence increase when they simultaneously work and engage with pairs and groups of people at the same time. It was also demonstrated that when they worked together, their fluency ratings increased while evaluating their list scores. It's crucial to keep in mind that assigning students to groups based on their roles motivates them to take responsibility for their roles (Chan, Wan, & Ko, 2019), which push them to speak up more and more,

as the excerpt below shows. According to Benne and Sheats (2020, 1948), functional roles are necessary for groups to develop, be productive, harmonize, and strengthen. Here, we concur with Martin (2000) and Martin and Rose (2003), who claimed that affect, evaluation, engagement, and judgment negotiate emotions when engaging in interpersonal interactions. On the other hand, it is referred to as interdependence or group solidarity, rather than rivalry (Johnson, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). In addition, the group of students recommended by Wang and Xu (2023) will work more collaboratively if they have similar topics, ages, and social relationships. The evidence of our study also clearly attests to the fact that speaking as a productive skill has been promoted in role-based online discussions, including interrupting while other roles are speaking, agreeing or disagreeing with another group's viewpoint, and even when group members are understood. In light of the data, we wholeheartedly embrace what Hughes & Reed (2016, p. 6) wrote in their book "How to Interrupt politely," according to which interrupting is a sociolinguistic skill that is inextricably linked to speaking as a useful skill.

The findings from the FGD, online observation, and interview data indicated that group activities, as shown in Chart 1, improved group members' engagement in each activity. This is in line with the plans created by the educator during the planning phase. The results of the study also showed that role-based group division encourages speaking abilities through collaborative abilities. Some of the subjects discussed include those that are known to be important for group dynamics, leadership, time management, and conflict management. It runs concurrently with Wood and O'Malley (1996). In summary, this situation requires competent educators to make collaborative work comfortable for educators and class group members. In addition, certain collaborative learning assignments are chosen while considering what students already know and believe (Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 2002). In addition, the most recent data come from Ardiningtyas et al. (2023), who claim that scaffolding behaviors such as instructors, consultants, modeling, contingent, and evaluators from more knowledgeable others (MKO) can help novice learners enhance their speaking skills when working collaboratively online. In this case, we claim that role-based and scaffolding are used interchangeably to promote EFL speaking (Butarbutar et al., 2023b). Thus, this study's findings confirm that speaking abilities are more confidently encouraged when one or a small number of peers acknowledge group growth. We acknowledge Veloutsou and Black's (2020) opinion that role-based members' performance can thrive and harmonize brand community engagement in light of the study's most recent findings.

The present study conducted an analysis of student interviews regarding their experiences with online group discussions and responsibilities. The analysis identified language use and performance, as well as affective and motivating elements, as key factors. The findings are consistent with previous research that suggests that students are more likely to speak up in blended collaborations when teachers provide guidance. Additionally, the study found that the affective and social elements that support student collaboration include motivation, curiosity, control, and challenges. The students' perspectives also indicate that their ability to communicate, including their social and emotional abilities, enhances their performance. Therefore, students should be mindful of their social conduct and emotions to encourage speaking during online discussions (Järvenoja, et al., 2020; Isohätälä et al., 2018; Shek & Shek's (2013).

Conclusion and Implications

We draw a general conclusion and agree with Benne and Sheats' functional role pedagogy of group work (2020, 1948). They believe that group work will be more effective if more students are aware of their responsibilities. Therefore, students' speaking skills advance their work in a more productive manner. Additionally, instruction and learning techniques that focus on student-centeredness or include them by enabling role-based teams to collaborate with one another; the findings of this study suggest that understanding and appreciating each role has an impact on student's performance, cognition, affect, motivation (Butarbutar et al., 2019; Butarbutar & Leba, 2023), and outcomes.

The study's findings go beyond EFL online discussions and will help students and teachers develop 21st-century skills of collaboration, critical thinking, communication, creativity, and technology literacy (Nur et

al., 2022). Understanding students' roles and responsibilities within a group or community will foster creativity, encourage more critical thinking, and motivate them to speak and communicate in more confident and effective ways. Therefore, the methods that teachers use to engage their children determine how they play their roles. In general, we make the following knowledge claims about the study, educational practices, and students: Responsibilities promote speaking EFL. The more speaking is supported, the more students become aware of their responsibilities in groups. Speaking promotion becomes more effective when the tactics used by educators are diverse.

The study makes the following recommendations for more research, inasmuch as increasing EFL speaking through role-based involvement in group online discussions is beneficial: Following an investigation into the viewpoints of educators and curriculum designers, the following strategies were developed: (i) impromptu role-based discussions or without prior coordination between teachers; (ii) open-ended speaking diagnostic tasks; (iii) designing for online assessment and evaluation of speaking rubrics; (iv) fluency-oriented speaking tasks; (v) the formation of skill groups for 21st-century students; (vi) technology-assisted peer learning assessments; (vii) gender disparities in collaborative abilities; (viii) projects based on collaboration with pre- and post-group models; and last but not least (ix) students' satisfaction with roles-based group division in online discussion, which is a confirmatory analytical component for roles-based collaboration.

Declarations

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