

# Vietnamese Teachers' and Students' Reflection: English Tertiary Online Classes Could Be Vivid With EFL Collaborative Learning Application in COVID-19 Social-Distancing Context

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**Abstract**—In the context of globalization and technology 4.0, the demand for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Vietnam has been growing. However, many Vietnamese students still have limited English communicative abilities, prompting Vietnam to launch innovations in English teaching and learning. EFL Collaborative Learning (CoL) has been suggested for application in Vietnam, as this approach offers numerous benefits for students in learning English and improving their English communicative abilities, especially during the social-distancing period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This qualitative and quantitative research provides a comprehensive and multidimensional perspective of online English CoL during the Covid-19 social-distancing period. This paper provides a clear illustration of CoL in online EFL classes in Vietnam during the above-mentioned period, focusing on two key aspects: 1. the support from teachers and students for online EFL CoL; and 2. the practical application of online EFL CoL in Vietnamese universities. The findings could hold significant relevance and application for numerous contexts of online English teaching, especially in an era of rapid technological and AI development. This study aims to make a substantial contribution in the development of TESOL, ELT, and education in Vietnam and globally, to meet the requirements of globalization and internationalization.

**Index Terms**—English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Collaborative Learning (CoL), online, tertiary education in Vietnam, social-distancing due to COVID-19

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and technology 4.0, the demand for learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) of Vietnamese students has been growing. However, many Vietnamese students still possess limited English communication abilities, underscoring the need for English teaching and learning innovation in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2023). To address these needs, Nguyen (2018) suggests the application of EFL Collaborative Learning (CoL) as this method could provide numerous benefits for Vietnamese students learning English and help develop English education (Nguyen, 2017). However, many authors continue to question whether cooperative learning is “a suitable teaching and learning method in Vietnam?” (Vo, 2010), as research (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025) indicates that some teachers and students remain hesitant and confused when applying EFL CoL. Therefore, raising awareness and belief in EFL CoL is crucial in enhancing effective EFL CoL application (Pham et al., 2008). On the other hand, in response to this innovation, Vietnam has seen the emergence and application of new methods and alternative approaches, including text-based, task-based, computer-based, content-based, and activity-based learning (Nguyen, 2018). However, this has seemingly “created confusion among teachers of English in this country”, as “many of them wonder what the ‘best’ teaching method is” for them to follow (Pham, 2007; Nguyen, 2018, p. 15). Among these, Collaborative Language Teaching (CLT) has garnered significant attention due to its learner-centred approach and focus on communication (Nguyen, 2018). However, previous studies highlight the inadequacies and difficulties of applying CLT in the Vietnamese context (Pham, 2000; Le & Barnard, 2009). Despite the fact that CLT has been applied in Vietnam since 1984, it remains that Vietnamese students' English communication abilities are still limited even after 40 years (Nguyen, 2018, 2023). Therefore, this raises the concern of whether there is a need for an alternative method that can support CLT and potentially help improve students' English communication skills.

EFL CoL is a proposed solution to address the shortcomings and difficulties of CLT in English education in Vietnam and Vietnamese learners' limited English communication skills (Nguyen, 2018), especially during the COVID-19 social distancing period (Nguyen, 2023). This qualitative and quantitative study, including surveys and in-depth-interviews

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with both teachers (Ts) and students (Ss) from various universities in Vietnam (*Part III*), provides a comprehensive and multidimensional perspective of online EFL teaching and learning through CoL during the COVID-19 social-distancing period.

(*Hereby once English teaching and learning is mentioned, or English Ts and Ss are mentioned, it is understood that such activity and performance is taken place online during the COVID-19 social-distancing period, unless otherwise noted*).

This paper highlights that EFL CoL methods could be applicable and feasible, even in online settings and during break times, as demonstrated through **1.** Ts' and Ss' support for online EFL CoL; and **2.** a clear illustration of EFL CoL application at Vietnamese universities. The two *research questions* are:

(Q1). *Do Ts and Ss support online EFL CoL during such the social-distancing period?*

(Q2). *Is EFL CoL feasible and applicable at Vietnamese universities in the above-mentioned context?*

The research aims to provide a clear illustration of Ts and Ss utilizing CoL methods in online EFL classes in Vietnam during that period, which could be applicable for English education in similar contexts where online English teaching is necessary. Furthermore, this holds significant value in contributing to the development of TESOL and ELT, not only in Vietnam but also regionally and globally. This is also the *significance* of this study.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

As aforementioned, while the demand for EFL learning among Vietnamese students has noticeably increased, their English communication ability continues to be limited, not meeting the desired expectations (Nguyen, 2018, 2023). To address this, many Vietnamese educational institutions have deployed the application of CLT, also known as the Communicative Approach (Pham, 2000), which research has shown to have many similarities with CoL (Nguyen, 2018). Although CLT has been officially introduced and implemented in Vietnam since 1984 (Nguyen, 2023), 40 years later, the majority of Vietnamese Ss still possess limited English abilities, struggling to communicate in English as desired. Even the *National Foreign Language Project 2020* (Nguyen, 2008) with its large size, scale and investment capital, has not been able to achieve the desired outcomes of Ss being able to communicate effectively in English (Nguyen, 2023). CLT application appears to have many shortcomings in Vietnam, and cannot be considered fully effective (Nguyen, 2012, 2023; Le & Barnard, 2009).

To deal with this issue, Nguyen (2018) recommends CoL and finds that "CoL including CL [Cooperative Learning] could not be considered as the same or "offspring" of CLT". Nguyen (2018) explains that "initially CoL in earlier times and then CL more recently, in the 1960s, emerged before CLT that was developed in the 1970s" (p. 2); "there seems to be...an intimate and reciprocal relationship between CoL and CLT although CoL 'is derived from general education or first language (L1) contexts' (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 307), and CLT is based on the second language (L2)" (pp. 2-3). Recognizing the similar characteristics and interrelationships between CLT and CoL, and based on the literature review, Nguyen (2018) suggests that CoL can be used 'in the meantime' or even as a 'replacement' for CLT in English teaching in Vietnam. This approach aims to help improve Ss' communication skills and promote English education as CoL (including CL) offers numerous benefits for Vietnamese Ss in English learning (Nguyen, 2017). Therefore, this paper proposes that CoL can be applied to online English teaching in Vietnam to promote Ss' English communication and language abilities.

More concerningly, during the COVID-19 social-distancing period, like many places in the world, Vietnam implemented online teaching and learning. This situation further exacerbated the already difficult task of teaching and learning of English, making it even more difficult. As a result, the limited English communication abilities of Vietnamese Ss have now become even more limited (Nguyen, 2023). Many studies reflect the inadequacy of many online classes having few or no Ss visible on the screen and limited engagement. There is even an example where lyrics of a Vietnamese song mock, "Your [Teacher's] voice echoes in the mountains and forests, why doesn't anyone [student/s] answer [respond]?" ("*Tiếng cô vang rùng núi, sao không ai trả lời?*" - Vietnamese language). These lyrics demonstrate how many online English classes become "dumb" or with "dead language" (Anderson, 1993, p. 477) with teachers delivering monologues, despite classes being meant for language learning (Nguyen, 2023). It is truly an issue worth getting concerned about.

Nguyen (2023) suggests applying EFL CoL to solve the above problem and notes many benefits of EFL CoL for online English teaching and learning at Vietnamese universities in the context of the COVID-19 social-distancing period. However, as noted by previous researchers, "simply putting students to work together in groups is no guarantee that cooperation will occur" (Jacobs, 1988, p. 97; Nguyen, 2018). This suggests that CoL application should be carefully considered and taken into accounts, implemented into research, and that there should be suggestive ways for CoL to be applied effectively in the Vietnamese EFL context (Pham et al., 2008, 2011; Nguyen, 2019). Although the COVID-19 social-distancing period has passed and the country has moved to a 'new-normal-period', many training programs of universities in Vietnam are still maintaining online English teaching (as in the case of T1 and T11 - see *Part III* for T) (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024, 2025).

Nowadays in Vietnam, the trend of using 'Computer Assisted Language Learning' (CALL) with online tools is necessary, effective and popular to help improve Ss' foreign language learning and collaborative learning skills (Nguyen, 2024). In addition, as Derakhshan et al. (2015) point out, despite the pros and cons, "CALL can be so much applicable

to both language learning and teaching in and out of the classroom” and that it emphasizes the “use of computer and Internet can facilitate learning, especially learning the second language (p. 111); beside “some of its drawbacks, this approach strengthens the notion that the advantages of applying CALL in educational environment outweighs its disadvantages” and “it can be more beneficial and strategic than the traditional methodologies in the modern world” (Derakhshan et al., 2015, p. 111). Derakhshan et al. (2015) highlight how the use of the CALL approach with online tools in educational systems has had an “incredible role in speeding up the learning process in adults and youngsters; CALL can also be applied to educational infrastructures as in language learning system in the future” (pp. 119-120). These findings further increase the motivation, credibility and feasibility of this study on online EFL CoL.

On the other hand, Pham et al. (2011) mention the suitability of CoL [CL included – Nguyen (2018)] for Vietnamese Ss and implies that further research for the effectiveness of CL or CoL, or cooperation among learners in Vietnam and Asian countries is needed. All of these points strengthen the idea of conducting research on the application of CoL in online EFL teaching for Vietnamese tertiary Ss. Nguyen and Nguyen (2024, 2025) also show the *positive support* of the majority (94,5%) of English Ts (see *Part IV*) for CoL application. Therefore, this study believes that CoL is feasible and should be applied to help promote Ss' English language and communication skills for online English education, especially in social-distancing situations. This paper provides additional information and research data to support the view of online EFL CoL application at Vietnamese universities. It brings a new, stronger and broader vision to the application of this method. Beside the interview data, this study examines survey data from both Ts (31) and Ss (111), including in-depth interviews from 7 Ss and 22 Ts (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). This data collectively illustrates the support of Ts and Ss for the real-life application of EFL CoL.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has receded, society has moved to a ‘new-normal-phase’ where online English teaching and learning still exists and remains necessary. This is since epidemics and natural disasters are still present and can happen at any time, meaning the need for social distancing is inevitable (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024, 2025). In addition, many Vietnamese universities still maintain online English teaching and learning for several training programs such as *distance-learning*-programs, *work-study training*-programs, or *second-degree* programs (as reflected by T1). There are even policies of some universities that require Ts to apply one week out of 15 weeks of the semester to teach online (as T11's case) to prepare Ts' skills in case of necessary application (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). Furthermore, due to the need to develop international communication and technology, especially in the era of technology and AI (*Artificial Intelligence*), online English instruction remains essential (Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024, 2025). The application of the EFL CoL approach is very important and of great significance. Therefore, it is believed that this study could be highly meaningful, applicable and contributive for TESOL and English education development not only in Vietnam but also in similar contexts where online English teaching is still maintained and necessary, especially in the modern era of technology and AI application (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). This is believed to be the meaningful and long-term significance of this study.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative and quantitative study data includes survey-questionnaires from both Ts (31) and Ss (111) via Google Form, and in-depth interviews with both Ts (22) and Ss (7) conducted online via Zoom and Zalo. For confidentiality, the participants are named according to the code symbol T (for teacher/s) and S (for student/s) and are accompanied by numbers (T from 1 to 22, for example: T1, ...T22; and S from 1 to 7, for example S1, ...S7), for convenience, tracking, referencing, and searching data throughout the research process. Data analysis and processing were conducted by creating tables, taking notes and saving Word, Excel, or paper files. Data-collection was conducted initially in Vietnamese, the mother tongue, for easy access and information collection from participants, then translated into English during the process of data synthesis, analysis and processing. It is worth noting that the research data was collected from Ts and Ss from 17 universities in different provinces and cities across Vietnam ranging from the North, the Central, the South and the highlands: Thai Nguyen, Vinh Phuc, Hanoi, Vinh, Quang Binh, Hue, Da Nang, Quang Nam, Nha Trang, Can Tho, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Lat, and Tay Nguyen.

The participant selection was *purposefully random*. Through relationships and through discussion and selection, the author group contacted (and increases contacts) participants with experience in a wide range of subjects, levels, and programs of study, including both English majors and non-majors. To diversify content and information collected, participants include Ts and Ss of specialized and non-linguistic programs, from a variety of subjects in the English major from *language theory* to *language practice*, *Skills*, *Translation* and *Interpretation*, *Culture...* of all study-years (*first to final* year) and non-majors of English varying in levels of school year. The participants include male, female, other genders who are Vietnamese university Ts and Ss with experience teaching and learning English online during break times. The participants were approached through the author/s' teaching and research network. The author/s called and emailed to invite participants to participate in the study, schedule interviews, deliver survey Google Forms and collect data. Some research assistants were called for help with transcribing and analyzing data. The scope of this paper uses data from both survey questionnaires and interviews with both Ts and Ss.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

(a). Teachers' and Students' Support for EFL CoL

1. Teachers' Support

(1). Teachers' Survey-Data

Discussing how much they support online EFL CoL application, 45.2% of Ts (14 out of 31) indicated "much support," 38.7% (12) indicated "support" That said, 16.1% (5) indicated "little support" (**Figure 1**).

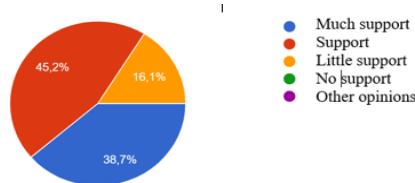


Figure 1. Survey-Ts' Reflection About Support for EFL CoL

(2). Teachers' Interview-Data

100% of interviewed Ts support online EFL CoL. However, 95% of Ts apply this method while 4,5% do not (**Table 1**).

TABLE 1  
INTERVIEWED-TEACHERS' SUPPORT FOR ONLINE EFL CoL (NGUYEN & NGUYEN, 2025)

Teachers' perspectives	Teachers interviewed (22 Ts = 100 %)	
Apply CoL pairs/groups	Yes: 95.5 %	No: 4.5 %
Support the application of CoL pairs/groups	100%	
Acknowledge benefits of EFL CoL	100%	

2. Students' Support

(1). Students' Survey-Data

90% of the surveyed Ss (100 out of 111) support online EFL CoL, among which 40.5% strongly support (45) and 49.5% support (55). Only 7.2%, 8 Ss, showed little support, 0.9% (1 S) no support, and 1.9% (2 Ss) had other opinions (**Figure 2**).

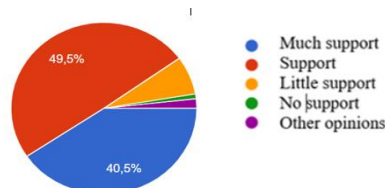


Figure 2. Survey-Ss' Reflection About Support for EFL CoL

(2). Students' Interview-Data

100% of interviewed-Ss supported EFL CoL and gave examples to demonstrate EFL CoL's practicality (**Part b**).

(b). Portrait of Vivid Performance of Online EFL CoL Application

1. Many EFL Subjects and Activities With CoL

(1). Voices From Teachers

100% of interviewed teachers (22) mentioned various EFL subjects with Ss' CoL (**Table 2**).

Similarly, the surveyed Ts taught many subjects of English in which they apply CoL, including *Reading, Speaking, Writing, Interpretation and Translation, Culture*, content classes of *ESP, and ELT* (see *Section 6*).

TABLE 2  
SUBJECTS APPLIED IN ONLINE-TEACHING-EFL-COL BY SURVEYED-TEACHERS (NGUYEN & NGUYEN, 2025)

Area	Subjects of English	Ts' reflection (T1 ... T25)
<i>Practical Language</i>	Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T9, T14, T17, T20
<i>Theoretical Language</i>	Morphology, Discourse Analysis, Linguistics, Speech Training, Phonetics, Syntax	T6, T7, T11, T18
<i>Translation</i>	Translation, Interpretation	T2, T6, T11, T12, T15
<i>English for Specific Purposes</i>	English for Environment, English for Tourism, Business English, English Grammar Usage, Research Methodology, English Language Teaching Method (ELT)	T2, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T11, T15, T16, T18
<i>Culture and Literature</i>	British American Literature	T11
<i>Basic English</i>	General English – non-major English	T11, T12, T17
<i>English for post-graduates</i>	English for Master Course/Thesis	T3, T5, T16,

(2). *Voices From Students*

Almost all surveyed Ss (95.5%) reflect the subjects with which they use pair/group work (Table 3). However, 2.7% surveyed-Ss reported “no” use and a small fraction “nothing” (1.8%).

TABLE 3  
STUDENTS' PAIR/GROUP WORK WITH EFL SUBJECTS

Examples of surveyed students' reflection of EFL subjects with pair/group work
(1) Basic grammar; (2) Speaking B1; (3) Language skills, Business English; (4) Presentation; (5) Scientific Research Methods; (6) most subjects; (8) Language skills, syntax, morphology, subjects related to English; (9) Speech Training. (10) Phonetics, Language Skills; (11) Business English, most subjects; (12) British - American Culture; (13) 4 Skills; Pedagogy; (14) Reading; (15) Mini Project.

Similarly, when being asked if they use CoL, 103 surveyed Ss (92.8%) answered yes, 6 no (5.4%), and 2 nothing (1.8%) (Figure 3).

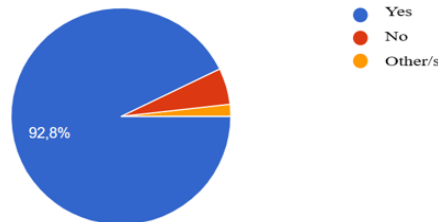


Figure 3. Percentage of Surveyed-Students Used Pair/Group Work in Online EFL Learning/Classes

Almost all interviewed Ss admitted having pair/group work for many subjects in their online EFL classes. For example, S1 and her group “do a magazine article review of the language skills subject”; S2 demonstrated that,

The activity that I remember for a long time was the group activity of *Basic Grammar* subject, I gave a presentation on the topic of pictures we drew pictures...about the theme of dream life, [focused on *Grammar*] about *simple future* tense.

2. *Benefits for Students Studying English With CoL*

(1). *Voices From Teachers*

31 surveyed Ts (100%) admitted the advantages EFL CoL brings to Ss and reflected EFL CoL’s benefits (Figure 4).

100% interviewed-Ts (22) thought EFL CoL brings numerous benefits to the Ss. However, when being in-depth interviewed, 3 Ts (13.6%) showed doubts about EFL CoL effectiveness, 2 Ts (9.1%) mentioned rarely using it, and another - T13 did not use as considering *Writing* and *Translation* subjects not suitable for Ss’ pair/group work.

Unlike T13, 95.5% of other interviewed-Ts mentioned that EFL CoL helps increase Ss’ interaction and improve Ss’ English communication ability. Many Ts emphasized applying CoL is necessary and is the only way for Ss to interact with each other amidst social distancing requirements from the COVID-19 period. Many Ts gave examples of this.

T5 demonstrated her Ss’ cooperative work with *Speaking* and *Discourse Analysis* subjects:

It is highly interactive...even with online teaching, ... when Ss work in groups, Padlet will be a tool...ensuring that ...just like [the T] teaches directly in class... Ss will exchange and discuss in Breakout-room, then they will build products according to the T’s requirements. After putting those products on Padlet which the other groups can see...and possibly compare the similarities and differences [of the products], then learn from [each]other, it’s intuitive and very convenient. (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025)

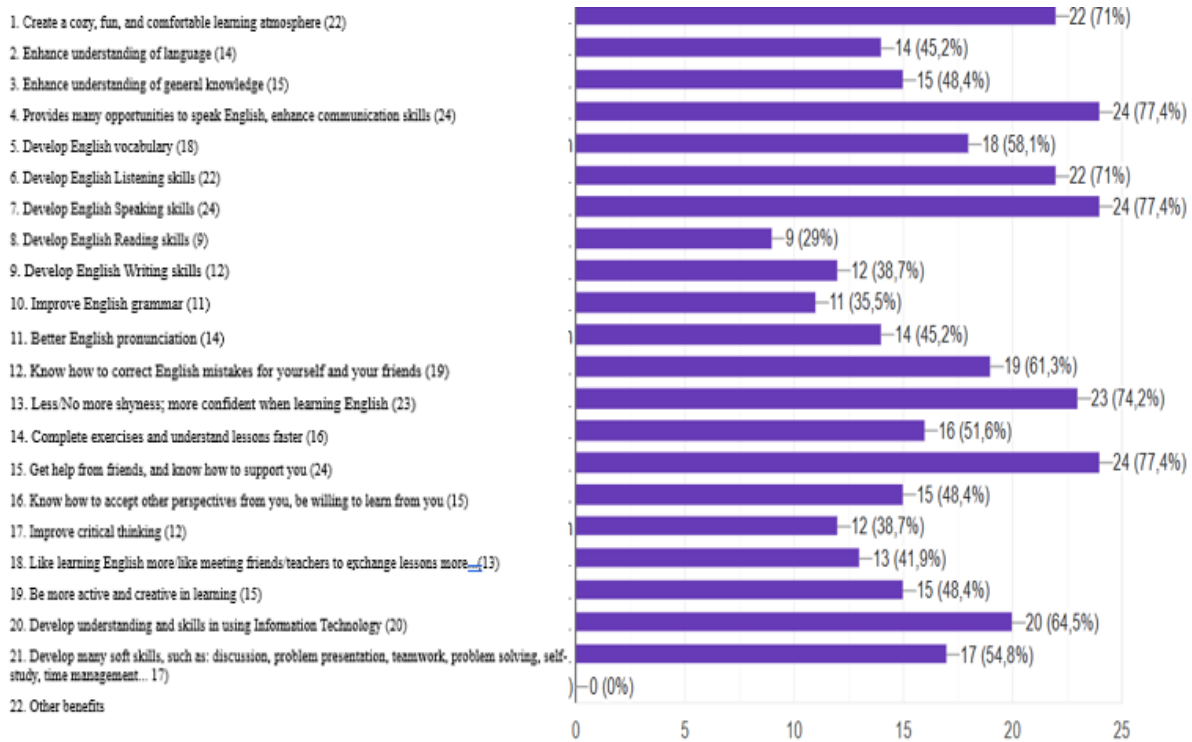


Figure 4. Surveyed-Teachers' Reflection (%) of EFL-CoL-Benefits for Ss

(2). *Voices From Students*

The surveyed Ss provided the results of EFL CoL benefits with different percentages, but the data corresponded to the same categories as those reflected by the Ts (Figure 5).

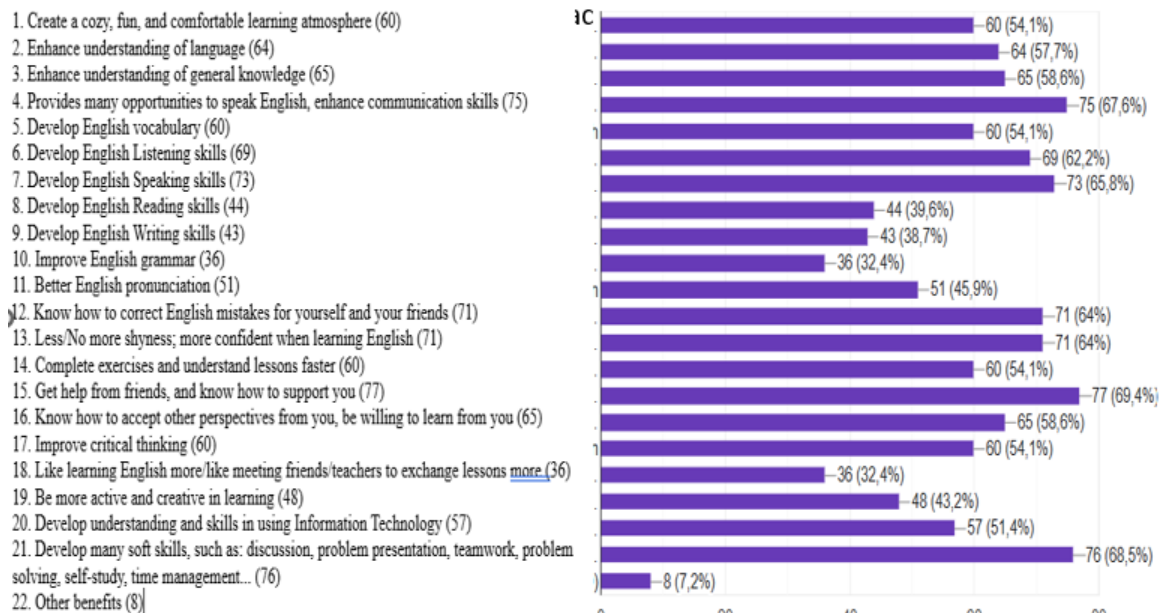


Figure 5. Surveyed-Students' Reflection (%) of EFL CoL Benefits

Meanwhile, 100% of the interviewed-Ss admitted to the advantages and benefits that they can obtain with EFL CoL. They reported having pair/group work for almost all subjects of English. S4 & S5 reflected that they had *role play* and pair/group conversation and mutual work with the *British* and *American Culture*.

S1 showed her interest in working with pairs/groups.

Studying in groups, I can interact with friends, that enables me to understand the lessons. [When] I don't understand, I can ask [friends] and vice versa I can help [them], when I re-teach [them], it is like reinforcing my knowledge; studying in groups brings many benefits, like "one tree won't grow a strong tree" but "three trees will be better", as this helps complete the work faster, more effectively, and accurately.

### 3. Ways of Forming Pairs/Groups

#### (1). Voices From Teachers

Almost all surveyed-Ts reflected on forming groups for Ss EFL CoL; a few mentioned no use or other opinions (**Table 4**).

TABLE 4  
TEACHERS' PAIR/GROUP FORMATION FOR STUDENTS' EFL CoL

Some examples	Surveyed-Teachers' reflection of Students' EFL pair/group work formation
1	Ts or Ss can operate and divide rooms based on the utilities provided by the platform.
2	I'm going to school during the break so I can't organize this activity.
4	T randomly assign pairs/groups ...
5	Deliver breakout room content on Zoom. Group of 3-5 students.
6	I go to the Break-Out rooms function in Teams, then I number the group on the total number of Ss. Teams will immediately distribute and divide virtual rooms...
7	Can't be specific.
8	Using Breakout-room division function in Zoom, Ts can proactively divide into groups, randomly, or let Ss choose.
9	Depends on the activity...grouping is up to the teacher: it can be random; it can be assigned specifically (better students with weaker students so they can help each other).
10	T calls 2Ss to do pair work or the teacher divides the room for a group of Ss to do group work.
11	Divide into groups of 3 or 4 when asking Ss to create quizzes with number of suggestions equal to number of Ss in group. During discussion, 1 S will be assigned to lead the group.
12	T divides into groups or app randomly divides them. Divide into pairs when role playing.

Most interviewed Ts mentioned their ways of forming pairs/groups for Ss' activities. For example, T2 said that she and her colleagues

were sent (by her university) a video showing how to divide [Breakout-rooms] to group Ss or divide Ss' groups in an online classroom.... I think pair-group activity is an indispensable in teaching process and Ss interaction is also an indispensable part, so the instructions must come with it.

T2 added some Ts in her place are still limited with this but "maybe those Ts just work slower, but I don't think they don't know how to use it, maybe they will use it more slowly after a while. And most of the time I see Ts using it all".

However, the interview-data showed there were still a few Ts rarely used Ss' pair/group work (T8) or never (T13).

#### (2). Voices From Students

Almost surveyed-Ss reflected forming groups for Ss EFL CoL; a few mentioned no use or other opinions (**Table 5**).

TABLE 5  
STUDENTS' PAIR/GROUP FORMATION FOR EFL CoL ACTIVITIES

Examples	Surveyed Students' reflection of EFL pair/group work formation
1	Teacher. Most Ts let Ss choose their own groups based on a specific number by dividing the total number of Ss in the class to find the number of Ss in a group and the group leader, Ss ...work together to create best possible outcome.
2	No.
4	Study online on the MST platform with random grouping on the application. The teacher divides into groups of 4-5 students. Group members assign their own parts and complete tasks.
5	After being assigned to a small group in the <i>Speech Training</i> lesson in class, my group is now playing and studying with the same 3 students. ...so, the job becomes very easy when finding good content to make ppt and presentations
6	T pairs or groups 3-4 Ss in random or list order. Everyone will assign tasks to each other and review lessons together.
7	Ts lets Ss choose own group members...5-6 Ss. We choose groups according to friends who are close to each other. Group leaders will divide the work depending on assignment type. For example, when there is a presentation, about 3 people research content, 1 making slides and 1 presenting. Members who create content must send a highlight of main ideas to the group leader for approval then the content will be sent to members to make slides.
8	Divide groups by MS Team, by class list or self-selection; 1 representative as leader or elected by group member.
9	"Draw and catch number lots".
10	[we] Do not have [pair/group work].
11	Ts assign or Ss choose own: 4-6 members. Assignment based on the strengths and weaknesses of each member.
12	The app only has 1 person talking with me.

In her interview, S2 agreed with her T's grouping of Ss for work and reported that "T automatically divides ...according to the order of class-list, 2-3 Ss per group".

### 4. Frequency of Using Pairs or Groups for English Teaching and Learning

#### (1). Voices From Teachers

While 95.5% of interviewed-Ts reported applying CoL, 4.5% of them still reported not (**Table 1**). T2 reflected that, Almost every session (*Business English*) operates in workgroups..., Ss must solve a situation that applies the background knowledge of *Business*. I really like it. I often apply workgroup activity that will let [Ss] discuss together and ...Ss' discussions are very lively because I will base on Ss' results of discussion and present[ation] and edit points [which seem] not to be okay, everyone does ...activities and is very passionate.

When being asked about their frequency of using/organizing Ss' pair/group activities, surveyed Ts' answers varied, but noticeably, almost Ts implied they often organize Ss' pair/group work English classes (**Table 6**).

TABLE 6  
SURVEYED-TEACHERS' FREQUENCY OF ORGANIZING STUDENTS' PAIR/GROUP WORK

Usual use	Everyday	Per week	Per month	Per semester	Not regularly	Seldom	Never/other
Every class has it. In almost all lessons. Every class is organized [with pairs/groups]	Everyday. Every subject requires.	once, twice, 3-4 times every week.	twice	4 periods	Sometimes, in certain lessons. Once per 2-3 lessons	Very rarely One every fortnight	Do not use. Busy with study so no use.

## (2). Voices From Students

Almost all interviewed Ss (100%) and a great number of surveyed Ss (**Table 3** and **Figure 3**) reported that they use pair/group work very often or usually. When being interviewed, S1 emphasized "Working in groups - it's a *regular* thing of our class with online learning".

Most surveyed-Ss reflected that they use pair-group work very often; however, a few of them reflected not regularly, even seldom or never (**Table 7**).

TABLE 7  
FREQUENCY OF SURVEYED-STUDENTS' USING OF PAIR/GROUP WORK

Usual use	Everyday	Per week	Per month	Not regularly	Seldom	Never/other
Too much so can't remember	Everyday. Every subject requires teamwork	once, twice, 3-4 times; 7-10 times, every week.	Once, once/twice	Sometimes. Once/every few months	Very rarely	Don't know. Never. None. Do not have. Silence.

## 5. Teachers' Encouragement for Students' Pair and Group Activities

### (1). Voices From Teachers

Not all – but most interviewed and surveyed Ts encourage their Ss to use pair/group work for English lessons. T2 said: "There are incentive '*polices*' or good evaluation methods to encourage Ss and increase interaction [in her class]".

That said, there were some surveyed Ts who answered not encouraging Ss; a few who said they encouraged Ss but not regularly, and one T maintained: "This question is a hint to me that I need to praise to encourage Ss more". Noticeably, most of the surveyed Ts seem to encourage their Ss to use pair/group work in learning English. One T suggested, "I use bonus points (added to process points) to praise Ss. I think it's very effective." Many other surveyed Ts share this viewpoint.

### (2). Voices From Students

Almost all interviewed Ss admitted their Ts encourage them to use pair/group work in and outside online English classes. Similarly, many surveyed Ss reflected their Ts' encouragement for Ss' practice with pair/group work; however, there are still a certain number of Ss who said "no" to this. S1's interview provides an example of T encouragement:

Usually, the T encourages us by adding points, ... whichever group performs well or something, she will add it to the midterm score, usually the score will be 7 or 8 when working effectively. If I do well, I will receive compliments, the T will give feedback and create a link for me to give feedback on the subject.

Some surveyed-Ss reported as followings: Ts encourage by giving high marks; Yes- give compliments and comments or give plus points; Yes, there are but not many; The teacher encouraged me to use online English learning group activities; By adding up the commendation score. I think that's the motivation helps me enjoy learning group activities more; Yes, encouraging Ss to study during the break, helps Ss not bored but more receptive.

## 6. Some Achievements With EFL CoL Online Application

### (1). Voices From Teachers

The interviewed-Ts have achieved many significant interactive online EFL CoL activities. T11 said

I also apply many pair/group activities in my [online] teaching. I teach *Speaking*, *Translation*, and *non-professional English*, I organize Ss' groups so they can support each other and monitor each other's learning, as well as motivate each other to learn, in groups on "**Padlet**", [Ss] can record a (pair-work) video and submit it and make a post together (upload to "Padlet") and "comment on each other". They can do vocabulary exercises together on a "jam board" and upload it to this "Padlet", each Ss group designs vocabulary boards (and) display *vocabulary*, present ideas, and write reflections about the lesson, I found this activity attractive and "visible".

Some CoL activities surveyed by Ts include online group activities, in which

Ss will discuss online on Teams to design a supply chain for a product. The group consists of 5 to 6 Ss - after discussion - will present the results online to the class; *brain-storm* ideas activity for *Writing* or collaborate to discuss and submit answers to *Listening* lessons. Practice *Speaking* in pairs, group discussions (*Speaking*,

*Writing* or skills combination); during teaching if group discussion needed, I [T] break the class into small groups, let them practice Speaking with each other, and I [T] supervises.

CoL activities have been vividly performed in English online tertiary classes, as reflected in the Ts data.

## (2). *Voices From Students*

Although a few of the Ss' survey opinions implied that this method does not help them, or some reflected not achieving as "I feel this is not effective because it may have internet problems leading to interrupted voice transmission," most others mentioned achieving much during the pair/group work of CoL

Some examples of survey-Ss' achievements are: "It helps improve communication skills, increase confidence when using English, and create opportunities to exchange and learn from other students in a friendly environment; comfortable school. Ss can interact with each other more and easily improve skills thanks to each other's feedback"; "Discussing increases Ss' ability for the subject"; "Nowadays there are many popular means of communication online, we can apply its advantages to make the most of its effectiveness",

Almost all interviewed Ss gain benefits with pair/group work (*Section A - b.2*). Noticeably S2 reported that

[Ss] develop opportunities to apply information technology, right, apply new tools and software to learning English when they contact friends on Zalo, Facebook, Instagram, looking for support quickly, faster and more convenient. [Ss] can text or call to contact via social networks or MS Team with Ts or friends or get support from friends and relatives and can seek support from online tools such as Google, Chrome or YouTube...

## B. *Discussion*

### (a). *Teachers' and Students' Support for EFL CoL*

#### 1. *Teachers' Support*

Regarding interview-data, nearly all Ts (100%) support EFL CoL and acknowledge EFL CoL benefits for learners. This has also been noted by many previous studies (Nguyen, 2018). This reflects Ts' positive views towards EFL CoL and CoL applicability and feasibility when Ts support rate is high (100%) (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). However, the small percentage of Ts who do not support EFL CoL are also worthy of attention because Ts' lack of awareness and understanding, and difficulty applying CoL in English teaching may prevent CoL from being widely used and used effectively in Vietnam's universities. Therefore, introducing, cultivating awareness, providing information, and developing skills about this method are crucial. Only then can we help Ts of English innovate and improve their knowledge and role "when applying CoL methods in teaching English at a Vietnamese university" (Nguyen, 2020).

Most surveyed Ts support EFL CoL (83.9%), displaying the applicability and development of the EFL CoL approach in online teaching. This may be due to Ts realizing and reaping EFL CoL benefits. However, it is also worth noting that a portion of Ts (16.1%) do not support CoL, maybe because these Ts have not yet grasped, applied, nor reaped benefits with this method. Therefore, it is necessary to propagate awareness and understanding of the EFL CoL method and its importance for Vietnamese tertiary Ts of English (Nguyen, 2020).

How to introduce and implement the *Theoretical Framework of EFL CoL* to Vietnamese Ts and Ss of English also needs attention and focus (Nguyen, 2018). This can be carried out through the organization of professional seminars, short courses, conferences, workshops, forums, or monographs to provide Ts and Ss with opportunities to interact, comprehend, share, apply, and promote CoL benefits and effectiveness to improve English teaching and learning in the tertiary environment in Vietnam, especially in the context of COVID-19 social-distancing or analogous situations.

It is noteworthy that Ts' support is essential because Ts' views and beliefs "influence the acceptance and implementation of new teaching directions, methods and activities, and so it plays a very important role" and influence the teaching practices, as pointed out by Pham (2004, pp. 31-32). Although Pham's (2004) research discusses CLT, previous studies show the reciprocal relationship of CLT and EFL CoL (Nguyen, 2018). Therefore, Ts' positive perspectives also contribute to deciding the application and development of EFL CoL in English teaching and learning (Pham, 2011; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025) and determines the activities in the classroom, specifically online English classes.

#### 2. *Students' Support*

The survey data shows that almost all Ss seem to support EFL CoL. This support was further evidenced with Ss' collaborative pair-group activities and the benefits they reaped with pair/group study in many English subjects. This shows the feasibility of applying for EFL CoL application. These results are like previous studies on Ss' views of EFL CoL (Nguyen, 2018, 2023). As Ueda (2005) and Pham et al. (2011) show, learners and their perspectives play a very important role in absorbing, comprehending, and implementing new learning methods. Hopefully, these data will contribute to the feasibility of CoL in EFL contexts.

The percentage of interviewed Ss who expressed opposition was non-existent, which may differ slightly from the general data of surveyed Ss. However, compared to Ss' interview data in previous studies, these results seem to be similar (Nguyen, 2018, p. 223) (*Figure 6*). The interviewed-Ss reflected 100% support EFL CoL; this shows that the trend of Ss supporting EFL CoL application is growing.

*Interviewed students' and teachers' advocacy and support for EFL CoL application*

Students (27)		Teachers (28)	
Strongly Agree	59 %	Strongly Agree	54 %
Agree	37 %	Agree	39 %
Partially Agree	4 %	Partially Agree	7 %

Figure 6. Percentage of Students Who Are for EFL CoL Application in Nguyen (2018)

Again, it is important to note that the Ss' positive support greatly impacts their use of EFL CoL. Their support enables Ss to become active and engaged learners in EFL CoL application. Instead of becoming "reluctant" or hesitant to take part in the group/s (Pham, 2007); Ss will develop positive attitudes and "want to be" doing group-work instead of having a "too negative attitude" towards CoL. Above all, Ss can become "cooperative" learners (Hassel, 1995, p. 208). This will help to solve the problem that many previous researchers are concerned with when Ss are put into groups but do not work cooperatively as mentioned above (Jacob, 1988). This is displayed in the following positive portrait of EFL CoL application, reflected by both Ts and Ss.

*(b). Portrait of Vivid Performance of Online EFL CoL Application*

This study, containing diverse data from both Ts and Ss, paints a vivid picture of six aspects of online EFL CoL application. Although there are still a few *negative* results in some aspects in terms of *not using, rarely using, not achieving or not much achieving, not encouraging or rarely encouraging* with EFL CoL, it is noticeable that most data implies *positive* results, which shows that EFL CoL can be applicable in English teaching at Vietnamese universities (Nguyen, 2018), especially in the online form and during the COVID-19 social-distancing period (Nguyen, 2023). The results seem consistent with previous research on EFL CoL in the Vietnamese tertiary context (Nguyen, 2018, 2023). The findings can dispel the skepticism and suspicion of previous authors regarding whether cooperative learning is "a suitable teaching and learning method in Vietnam" (Vo, 2010), as it can be seen from the research and this article that EFL CoL is effective, and that Ts and Ss are performing with it. Research data from Ts and Ss, both from survey and interview sources, shows that EFL CoL can be applied in many subjects, many school year levels, and many English language-major and non-major study programs.

The results help to strengthen Ts' confidence in applying EFL CoL to develop their English teaching. The study also shows various activities of EFL CoL that Ts and Ss need to implement to make English teaching and learning effective. In addition, Ts' role in encouraging and supporting Ss to learn collaboratively in groups is very important, helping to increase the effectiveness of applying this method in teaching and learning English (Nguyen, 2020). At the same time, Ss' self-awareness and regular use of EFL CoL also plays a significant role in their EFL CoL success. Furthermore, there needs to be encouragement and support from schools, education and language experts, and educational administrators to help the EFL CoL application become more efficient.

It is noticeable that Ss' reflection, such as S2's (See **Ab6(2)**), indicates a new bright spot in Ss' EFL *collaborative learning* activities, showing that EFL CoL is closely linked with the development of science and technology. This also means the trend of applying technology in promoting CoL and improving language skills, English and communication and interaction skills of Vietnamese Ss. This is also the long-range meaningful influence and contribution of this research, in the trend of technology and AI application (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024, 2025).

## V. CONCLUSION

### A. Summary

In summary, the paper sheds light on two issues: *first*, Vietnamese teachers' and students' support for online EFL CoL application, and *second*, a vivid portrait of six aspects of their online EFL CoL application during the COVID-19 social-distancing period: **1.** many EFL subjects and activities with CoL; **2.** many EFL CoL benefits; **3.** students' EFL pairs/groups formation; **4.** their frequent pair/group work; **5.** teachers' encouragement for students' pair/group activities, and **6.** students' achievements in online EFL CoL. Obviously, CoL is a beneficial method for EFL students in Vietnam, and possibly in other countries where English is taught and learned as a foreign language. This paper's findings support the feasibility and applicability of EFL CoL (Nguyen, 2018), even in the online format and during social distancing due to COVID-19, and further for similar contexts as online English teaching remained necessary (Nguyen, 2023; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). This dispels the suspicion of previous authors about whether cooperative learning is "a suitable teaching and learning method in Vietnam" (Vo, 2010) and minimizes Ts' doubts about the feasibility and usefulness of online EFL CoL.

While there is still skepticism and confusion about which English teaching method should be considered "the 'best' teaching method" or a suitable one for Ts to follow (Pham, 2007; Nguyen, 2018, p. 15), applying EFL CoL is a combination of many approaches, including text-based, task-based, content-based, activity-based and computer-based teaching and learning, and it is also related to CLT method (Nguyen, 2018), it could be suitable and beneficial for English teaching and learning at the tertiary level in Vietnam, and possibly in other levels and fields of study that use

English, not only in Vietnam but also in the region and internationally. The paper paints a picture of applying EFL CoL to help develop English teaching and learning in Vietnam, improve Ss' interaction and communication ability in English, to help improve the difficult and limited situation of Vietnamese Ss in communicating and using English that has not been achieved for many years. This is also a meaningful value, and practical and social applicability of this study.

### *B. Limitation and Delimitation, and Further Research*

One limitation of this research is the lack of observations in the data source. This is because the study was conducted during and shortly after the COVID-19 period when researchers' performance was limited due to the pandemic and its impact (for example, the researcher/s faced with limitation in contacting, travelling, meeting the participants or the research-assistants, as well as doing some research procedures or working services; or maybe with limited health issues). Therefore, when conducting additional research in the future, the authors plan to include observations, as well as the offline performance of both Ts and Ss of EFL in Vietnamese universities to produce deeper insights and highlight the importance and feasibility of EFL CoL at the tertiary level and possibly the secondary or elementary levels.

In addition, despite the recent development of AI, this research did not consider AI use for online EFL teaching. This may be due to many difficulties and limitations as above mentioned, because of COVID-19 and post-COVID-19. Therefore, further research will take AI use into consideration to support research on EFL CoL. In the future, it should promote research on EFL CoL with applying AI and technology in English teaching at Vietnamese universities (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024, 2025).

To conclude, this paper suggests that EFL CoL application is valuable as online English instruction becomes increasingly popular across various institutions and fields with the outbreak of information technology and AI application in the education system in Vietnam and around the world (Derakhshan et al., 2015; Nguyen, 2024). It is emphasized that EFL CoL application is useful for students in Vietnam, Asian countries, and any other country where English is taught as a foreign language. EFL CoL enables Ss to become active and engaged learners, instead of being "reluctant" or hesitant to take part in the group/s. Ss with EFL CoL education also have positive attitudes and "want to be" doing group work, improving not only interaction, but also communication, language abilities, and other crucial skills. Further research on EFL CoL should be conducted in numerous institutions across different levels of education and learning programs to help EFL CoL application become more effective, contributing to the innovation and development of TESOL and English education in Vietnam. This will subsequently promote Ss' English communicative and collaborative abilities to help them better respond to globalization and international communication, especially in the modern era of robust technology development and AI application worldwide.

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