

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

English proficiency mean a person's ability to read, write, speak, and understand English well. These skills include grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening. English proficiency are seen as very important for students to do well in school at all levels. Being good at using the language is an important part of academic success. That's why many universities have English skill requirements for students who want to join international programs (Bo, Fu & Lim, 2023).

Efforts to improve students' English proficiency should start from an early age to make learning faster. Learning English early gives children a strong foundation to help them in school and in their future careers (Kaipbergenova, 2024). Teaching English to children not only helps with school needs, but also gives them important communication skills for daily life and the global work world. These efforts use fun and interactive ways of teaching, which make learning more effective. Improving children's English proficiency is a long-term investment with many benefits.

Collaborative learning is an English teaching method that is increasingly used today because of its effectiveness in improving students' communication, teamwork, and critical thinking skills. In the context of education in Indonesia, this method is an important part of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which

emphasizes project-based learning and active student participation. This curriculum encourages students to learn through social interaction and collaboration, whether in small groups or as a whole class, to complete tasks or projects together. This approach provides a more contextual and meaningful learning experience, allowing students to understand the material deeply while also developing 21st-century skills. Through the implementation of collaborative learning, teachers are not only knowledge providers but also facilitators who guide students in exploration and discussion.

Many studies have explored the impact of collaborative learning on students' English language skills. Rick, Guzdial, Holloway-Attaway, and Walker (2023) found that using technology in collaborative learning helps develop speaking, writing, and critical thinking skills through interactive discussions and meaning negotiation. Ansari and Khan (2020) discovered that social media enhances student engagement and enriches speaking and writing practice in English through peer-to-peer interaction. Meanwhile, Qureshi et al. (2021) identified the role of social factors, such as interactions with peers and instructors, in supporting collaboration that positively influences students' learning performance. De Hei et al. (2020) highlighted that effective collaboration in higher education can improve students' verbal competence in English, especially in international settings. These studies confirm the relevance of collaborative learning in enhancing language proficiency.

Previous studies have explored the relationship between collaborative learning and students' motivation in learning English. Ramzan, Javaid, and Ali (2023) found that collaborative learning techniques, such as joint writing tasks and feedback sessions, can increase students' motivation while also expanding their vocabulary. This research highlights the role of teachers in creating a collaborative environment that supports student engagement. Additionally, Wulantari et al. (2023) revealed that collaborative strategies not only enhance students' learning satisfaction but also help build a culture of continuous learning. The sociocultural theory-based approach by Vygotsky, as explained by Tolibayev and Menlimuratova (2023), suggests that social interaction in collaborative learning can strengthen students' motivation by creating an interactive learning environment. Overall, collaborative learning plays a significant role in supporting student engagement and motivation in English language learning.

Previous research has shown that collaborative learning is more effective than traditional learning in increasing student engagement, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving abilities. Taxirovna (2024) stated that collaborative learning supports deeper knowledge construction through teamwork, although it requires good time management. Elbyaly and Elfeky (2023) found that online collaborative learning enhances motivation and participation compared to traditional methods. Similarly, Yoo et al. (2024) showed that metaverse-based learning

increases active participation and learning satisfaction. In addition, Zhang et al. (2024) highlighted that agent-based approaches in collaborative learning can simulate more realistic and relevant interactions than traditional methods. Overall, these studies emphasize the advantages of collaborative learning in promoting more interactive and effective education.

Although many studies have explored the impact of collaborative learning on students' English proficiency, most of them focus on higher education or contexts involving technology and social media. Research by Rick et al. (2023) and Ansari & Khan (2020) highlights the role of technology in enhancing speaking and writing skills, while Qureshi et al. (2021) and De Hei et al. (2020) examine social factors in higher education that support verbal skill development. However, few studies discuss the application of collaborative learning in primary education, especially in teaching English to young children at the elementary school level. Additionally, while previous research acknowledges the importance of collaboration in increasing student engagement and motivation, there is little research on its direct impact on English language skills among young children in rural areas, such as Napal Putih District, Bengkulu utara

Based on previous findings, there is a gap in the application of collaborative learning in more specific contexts, particularly among young children in rural areas. Most studies focus on technology-rich environments or higher education students (Rick et al., 2023; De Hei et al., 2020). Meanwhile,

limited resources and accessibility in rural areas can effect how collaborative learning is implemented, raising questions about whether the findings from these studies can be effectively applied in a different context.

Some studies, such as those by Ramzan et al. (2023) and Wulantari et al. (2023), show that while collaborative learning can boost student motivation and engagement, its direct impact on improving English proficiency in young children is still unclear. Meanwhile, Taxiroyva (2024) and Zhang et al. (2024) highlight the benefits of collaboration in language learning, but mostly in different settings, such as technology-rich classrooms or well-structured learning environments. This raises questions about how collaborative learning is applied and measured in current research.

To understand the real problems at SDN 60 Bengkulu Utara, the researcher did preliminary research by doing observations and interviews on April 17, 2025. The results showed that the English teacher at SDN 60 Bengkulu Utara used the collaborative learning method by putting students into small groups of 4–5 people. They worked together to do tasks like making conversations and doing role plays. The teacher gave clear instructions and helped the students during the activities. The main challenges were that some students were shy to speak and not all group members participated equally. However, this method was found to be effective in improving speaking and listening skills because students got used to discussing with

others. The teacher also saw that students became more motivated, brave, and cooperative, which helped improve their English proficiency little by little.

Many previous studies have shown that collaborative learning is effective in improving English proficiency, especially in higher education and in technology-based settings. Studies by Rick et al. (2023) and Ansari & Khan (2020) highlight the importance of social interaction and digital media in helping students learn language through collaboration. However, these studies rarely focus on elementary schools, especially in rural areas where access to technology and educational resources is limited. Because of this, there is a research gap in using this method with young learners in places with few facilities, like SDN 60 Bengkulu Utara.

The author recognizes that English proficiency is a crucial skill that encompasses reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension. This proficiency significantly influences students' academic achievement across educational levels. Consequently, many educational institutions, including international universities, establish English proficiency requirements for prospective students. For this reason, efforts to enhance students' English proficiency should be initiated at an early stage to provide a strong foundation that supports both their learning process and their preparedness to face global challenges in the future.

In this regard, collaborative learning has emerged as an effective instructional method to foster the development of English skills. Previous studies have demonstrated that this method can improve students' speaking, writing, and reading comprehension abilities, while also enhancing their motivation and active participation. However, much of the existing research has been conducted at the higher education level or within technology-supported learning environments. Few studies have focused on the application of collaborative learning in primary education, particularly in rural areas where educational resources remain limited. This indicates a research gap that requires further investigation.

Based on these considerations, the author conducted preliminary research at SDN 60 Bengkulu Utara and observed that collaborative learning had been implemented by the English teacher through small-group activities such as conversations and role plays. Although some students were still less engaged, the observations indicated improvements in students' motivation, confidence, and collaboration. Therefore, this study is significant in examining the influence of collaborative learning on the English proficiency of elementary school students in rural contexts. The findings are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge on language education and provide practical implications for improving English teaching strategies in schools with similar conditions.

This research is important because elementary school children need a learning approach that fits their cognitive and social development. A collaborative approach is believed to help improve their confidence in speaking, teamwork, and understanding of language in a more meaningful way through direct interaction with other students. Through this study, the researcher can find out the direct impact of collaborative learning on English proficiency of elementary students, as well as the challenges and supporting factors in using it in rural areas. The results of this research are expected to add to the knowledge about collaborative learning in language education at the elementary level and give real contributions to improving teaching strategies in schools with similar conditions.

B. Identification of the Problem

Based on the background explained above, several main problems can be identified as the reasons for doing this research, as follows:

1. There is still limited research that looks at the direct effect of the collaborative learning method on the English proficiency of elementary school students, especially young learners in rural areas like SDN 60 Bengkulu Utara.
2. Most studies about collaborative learning focus on higher education and high-tech environments, so they do not give a clear picture of how this method works in elementary schools with limited facilities and access to technology.

3. There is no detailed data yet about the challenges and supporting factors in using collaborative learning for English lessons at the elementary level, especially related to the development of students' speaking, listening, and teamwork skills in rural classrooms.

C. Limitation of the Problem

This research is limited to studying the effect of collaborative learning on the English proficiency of fifth-grade students at SDN 60 Bengkulu Utara. The main focus is on four language skills: vocabulary, speaking, writing, and reading. This study does not include listening skills, grammar, or pronunciation in detail. The research is done in a rural elementary school with limited facilities and technology, so the results may not apply to schools in utara areas.

D. Research Questions

This research focuses on the use of collaborative learning to improve the English proficiency of young EFL students in Napal Putih District, North Bengkulu, by looking at its effects, challenges, and supporting factors. Based on the background, the problem in this research is written in the following question:

1. How does collaborative learning affect the English proficiency of fifth grade students at SDN 60 Bengkulu utara?
2. What are the challenges and supporting factors in using collaborative learning to improve the English proficiency of fifth grade students at SDN 60 Bengkulu utara?

E. The Purposes of the Research

Based on the research questions above, the purpose of this study is:

1. To analyze the affectt of using collaborative learning on the English proficiency fifth grade students at SDN 60 bengkulu utara.
2. To identify the challenges and supporting factors that affectt the success of using the collaborative learning method to improve students' English proficiency.

Therefore, this research is expected to give a clear understanding of how affective collaborative learning is, and what challenges it has, as an innovative learning approach for young EFL students in that context.

F. The Significants of the Research

This research has both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it is expected to add to academic studies about how affective collaborative learning is in developing the English proficiency of young EFL students. The results can also add to education literature, especially about collaborative learning in EFL settings, and give useful information for future research. Practically, this research can give guidance to teachers on how to use collaborative learning to improve students' English proficiency. It can also help teachers understand the challenges and supporting factors in using this method, so they can create better and more suitable strategies based on the needs of students in Napal Putih District, Bengkulu Utara.

G. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

This research defines key terms to give clear understanding, which are *collaborative learning*, *EFL young learners*, and *English proficiency*, as the main focus of the study in Napal Putih District.

1. Collaborative Learning is a learning approach where students work together in small groups to reach the same learning goals. It helps them build communication skills, teamwork, and both individual and group responsibility.
2. EFL Young Learners are children in elementary to junior high school who learn English as a foreign language. They have limited English proficiency because they are not native speakers.
3. English Proficiency is students' ability to use English well. It includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. This ability is measured using certain criteria through tests or other related assessments.