

Reconceptualizing the Forum Group Discussion model as a collaborative pedagogical approach in EFL classrooms

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Abstract. Forum Group Discussion (FGD) has been the most applied technique in EFL classroom and designed to generate interaction among students and between students and teacher. In response to the increasing attention on cooperative learning in the education of the 21st century, it is indispensable to consider how FGD should be organized so that it works as a collaborative learning method. The pedagogical features of productive FGD in English language learning has yet to be conceptually concretized. This paper explores the defining characteristics of the ideal FGD model which is based on collaborative learning. Utilizing an integrative review and conceptual analysis, the research brings together perspectives from collaborative learning theory, sociocultural theory and interaction related perspectives within the field of second language acquisition. Instead of reviewing current methodologies, this paper describes the principles required for a successful and meaningful forum group discussion technique. It is argued that the modelled framework proposes structured levels of discussion, explicit role allocation, meaningful interaction patterns and reflective evaluation to mediate a well-balanced involvement and dialogic interaction. Through a systematic delineation of the core characteristics of an effective FGD model, this study contributes a theoretically substantiated framework to guide English language educators, curriculum designers, and scholars in the advancement of collaborative learning practices in EFL contexts.

Keywords: collaborative learning; focus group discussion (FGD); EFL pedagogy

1 Introduction

A significant shift away from traditional teacher-centered models and toward more learner-centered, collaborative paradigms has occurred in the field of education in the twenty-first century. According to Chowdhury (2021), this shift is a reflection of a in educational philosophy, where teaching is no longer viewed as the mere transmission of knowledge but as a process that actively involves learners in constructing their own understanding. In the

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present era, where the capacity to co-construct knowledge is just as important as knowledge itself, this change is not just a pedagogical trend but a necessity. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), this transition holds profound significance as effective teaching approaches are expected to engage and motivate learners while addressing their diverse needs (Achieng, 2023). Fundamentally, language is a social instrument; mastery of it is inextricably linked to interaction, impromptu communication, and the shared navigation of meaning among a community of learners. Research has demonstrated that participation in collaborative learning activities exerts a statistically significant positive influence on students' academic motivation over the course of their educational experience (Loes, 2022).

Collaborative learning is at the heart of this modern education. It posits that students do not learn in isolation but through a dynamic social interaction and shared responsibility for learning (Chowdhury, 2021). While often used interchangeably with cooperative learning, these two approaches have distinct historical origins that have converged over the last fifty years (Yang, 2023). Essentially, this method requires students to assume a more active role in their own learning, rather than passively receiving information from the instructor (Loes, 2022). Learners advance from rote memorization to a more practical and intuitive command of the language by exchanging experiences and working together to overcome linguistic obstacles.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) has become a mainstay in many EFL classrooms among the different methods used to create this atmosphere. When conducted effectively, focus group discussions (FGDs) provide opportunities for learners to articulate their ideas, negotiate meaning, and apply language knowledge in authentic communicative contexts. Furthermore, group-based interactions are proven to be a contributing factor in increasing students' oral fluency (Abbasi & Anthony, 2024).

However, a closer examination of present teaching procedures indicates a worrying disconnect. Despite its widespread use, the FGD's pedagogical underpinnings are frequently still poorly understood. What is labelled as an "FGD" in many EFL contexts is often reduced to an unstructured discussion or "free-talk" session with no clear goals, responsibilities, or strategic interactional norms. These conversations frequently lead to uneven participation in the absence of a strong structural design, where dominant speakers overpower their fellows or the conversation stalls because there is insufficient cognitive challenge. According to Asrifan & Heriyanti (2023) stated that design and facilitators are crucial for educators to understand students' perspectives on these methods, as the success of pedagogical practices depends heavily on how learners value the technique. The fundamentals of successful EFL education, which stress the value of planned, goal-oriented, and learner-centered activities to guarantee meaningful engagement, are in conflict with this problem. The fundamentals of successful EFL education, which stress the value of planned, goal-oriented, and learner-centered activities to guarantee meaningful engagement, are in conflict with this problem (Achieng, 2023).

This inconsistency highlights an important fact brought to light by recent research: successful group interaction does not happen by accident. Skillful facilitation and deliberate design are necessary for productive collaboration (Mwilongo, 2025). Sociocultural Theory, which maintains that learning is a mediated process and only thrives inside the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) when suitable scaffolding is offered, sheds more light on this. According to interactionist theory, what really propels linguistic development is the "push" to provide understandable output and the ensuing negotiation of meaning during a communication breakdown (Afshar, 2021; Xu & Li, 2022).

Despite these well-established theories, integrative frameworks that precisely describe what makes a FGD model "effective" within the particular limitations of the EFL classroom are still conspicuously lacking. The majority of the material now in publication concentrates on collaborative learning in general, with little attention paid to the particular workings of

the FGD as a structured pedagogical intervention (Yang, 2023). Instead of being a simple classroom activity, FGD needs to be reconsidered as a complex, theory-driven teaching technique. Effective structuring, like role-based involvement, allows FGD to go beyond superficial conversation and improve certain speaking skills (Butarbutar & Sauhenda, 2025; Nirma et al., 2024).

In order to close this gap, this study aims to determine the essential elements of a successful FGD model. By synthesizing insights from collaborative learning, sociocultural theory, and interactionist perspectives, this article purpose a new conceptual framework. This framework aligns with the need for social presence and teacher-student interaction as key drivers of learning performance (Qureshi et al., 2023a). The purpose of this study is to give educators a clear, theoretically based road map for implementing focus group discussions (FGDs) that do more than just “get students talking, “rather, they foster deep engagement, genuine interaction, and the development of critical reasoning skills that are necessary for language proficiency in the contemporary world (Abidin et al., 2025; Farahian & Parhamnia, 2021).

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Architecture of Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is fundamentally more than a mere grouping of individuals; it is an intentional instructional design where knowledge is not “transmitted” but “co-constructed” through high-stakes social engagement., this is a shared intellectual arena where students work toward shared cognitive objectives. This paradigm recognizes that students frequently discover deeper meaning when they struggle with concepts with their classmates. Empirical support shows that social factors such as interaction with peers and teachers positively impact collaborative learning, directly affecting academic performance (Qureshi et al., 2023a).

However, physical proximity simply is not sufficient for the “proper” implementation of collaborative learning. Positive interdependence a situation in which students understand they cannot succeed unless their teammates do is essential to the effectiveness of group work. Group conversations frequently devolve into “social loafing” or dominance by a few outspoken students in the absence of the structural pillars of individual accountability and promotive interaction. Addressing these structural needs requires a shift in the pedagogical dynamic, where the teacher acts as a facilitator of discovery rather than the sole authority; in modern higher education, this facilitation often leverages digital media and hybrid systems to optimize interaction (Anabel & Simanjuntak, 2022). In EFL situations, a well-organized collaborative atmosphere not only improves linguistic accuracy but also develops the affective filter that reduces fear and gives students the confidence to take the linguistic risks required for true fluency.

2.2 Sociocultural Theory: The Social Genesis of Thought

Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, which maintains that social life is the source of all higher mental functions, serves as the theoretical foundation for this investigation. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the “magic middle” between a learner’s present skill and their latent potential, is crucial to this. According to (Lantolf et al., 2023), language learning in the ZPD is not just about imitation, but a collaborative process where social interaction acts as the primary vehicle for cognitive development. Language is the main instrument for cognitive

development in the ZPD. FGD acts as a critical mediational tool where learning is intensified through social presence.

This theory turns the classroom into a place of collective scaffolding during a Forum Group Discussion (FGD). Students are employing “private speech” and “social dialogue” to assimilate new grammatical and conceptual structures when they debate a difficult subject in English. Therefore, the FGD is an essential mediational instrument rather than an auxiliary activity that enables students to overcome their personal limitations with the help of more experienced peers, ultimately resulting in the internalization of the language itself.

2.3 The Interactionist Perspective: Negotiation as a Catalyst

While Vygotsky focuses on the social-cognitive growth, the Interactionist Perspective provides the linguistic engine for this study. Interaction Hypothesis posits that language acquisition is most potent when learners encounter a “communication breakdown. To maximize this, integrating “focus-on-forms” (such as spoken form and word parts) within communicative tasks can involve deeper processing and yield higher learning gains (Afshar, 2021). Furthermore, the timing of such instructions is critical for balancing form and meaning (Xu & Li, 2022), while role-based engagement ensures every learner has a specific responsibility to negotiate (Butarbutar & Sauhenda, 2025).

Further illuminate this through the cycle of input, output, and feedback. Within a robust FGD, students are forced to produce “pushed output,” stretching their current linguistic resources to be understood. The learner must adjust their discourse to be more grammatically correct and contextually suitable when a peer asks for clarification. The essential mechanism that encourages Second Language Acquisition (SLA) forward is this cyclical process of identifying their own weaknesses and making adjustments based on feedback.

2.4 Dialogic Learning: Beyond Surface-Level Talk

For an FGD to achieve its full pedagogical potential, the quality of talk must move from the “cumulative” (simple agreement) to the “dialogic” where reasoning is made visible. FGD is an effective platform for promoting reflective thinking, allowing participants to share knowledge and recognize the link between theory and practice (Farahian & Parhamnia, 2021). Exploratory speaking is a sophisticated type of classroom interaction that makes reasoning visible. In this mode:

- a. Students must justify their opinions with evidence.
- b. Challenges are constructive: Disagreement is not seen as conflict, but as a catalyst for deeper inquiry.
- c. Argumentation is analytical: Students go from “what they think” to “why they think it.”

This dialogic approach ensures that the FGD becomes a crucible for higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Indeed, optimized FGD strategies are identified as a way to quickly build students’ critical thinking skills at various educational levels (Abidin et al., 2025).

2.5 The “Gap” in Practice: Reconceptualizing the FGD

Despite the richness of these theories, a persistent gap remains in their actual implementation in classrooms. Traditional FGD practices are often marred by a structural vacuum, resulting in what researchers describe as “aimless chatter”. A well-structured FGD framework must address practical challenges by establishing ground rules, using open-ended questions, and maintaining neutral facilitation (Mwilongo, 2025). Without a clear conceptual framework,

these sessions often lack cognitive depth, failing to push students into their ZPD or force the negotiation of meaning.

This study argues that the current “loosely-defined” FGD model is insufficient for the demands of modern EFL education. There is a critical need to synthesize the social support of Vygotsky, the linguistic rigor of the Interactionists, and the cognitive challenge of Dialogic Learning into a Unified FGD Framework. Only through such a systematic reconceptualization can we ensure that classroom discussions are not merely a break from “real teaching,” but are the most powerful learning experiences in the curriculum. The importance of this systematic reconceptualization is evidenced by research in local contexts, such as at SMAN 5 Barru, which demonstrates that when FGD is treated as a systematic communicative activity, it significantly improves students’ fluency and vocabulary (Nirma, n.d.; Nirma et al., 2024). Furthermore, such a framework should be adaptable to virtual platforms to ensure rich data interaction even in remote settings (Nobrega et al., 2021; Ramos-Lucca et al., 2025). By integrating advanced models like the Flipped Classroom, educators can further enhance student activity and engagement within the FGD setting (Wahyuni & Ningsih, 2024), ensuring that classroom discussions are not merely a break from ‘real teaching,’ but are the most powerful learning experiences in the curriculum.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design: The Integrative Review Approach

This study employed an integrative literature review approach, which is an advanced methodological framework ideal for critically synthesizing diverse theoretical stances into a cohesive conceptual model. Unlike systematic reviews that aggregate empirical data to address narrow statistical questions, the integrative review allows for the convergence of established SLA theories with contemporary instructional methodologies. This design was deliberately selected to construct a novel, unified pedagogical framework by synthesizing Sociocultural Theory, Interactionist Perspectives, and Collaborative Learning theories applied within EFL contexts.

3.2 Data Analysis and Synthesis Procedure: A Three-Tiered Approach

A methodical search approach was used across high-impact international databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and Google Scholar, to guarantee the academic rigor and “proper” depth of the synthesis. Peer-reviewed papers, classic books, and reputable reviews released between 2020 and 2026 were the main focus of the search. This specific period was chosen to document the development of instructional technology following the pandemic and the ensuing changes in the dynamics of face-to-face and hybrid collaborative learning (Anabel & Simanjuntak, 2022; Ramos-Lucca et al., 2025)

A rigid framework of inclusion and exclusion criteria guided the literature selection process:

- a. **Thematic Scope:** Only research that examined the relationship between Second Language Acquisition (SLA), organized group interaction, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction was included.
- b. **Methodological Quality:** Research that offers solid theoretical justifications or empirical data about the workings of peer-mediated learning and classroom discussion was given preference.

- c. Geographic and Contextual Diversity: Literature reflecting different EFL settings (secondary schools and higher education) was given priority to guarantee the framework's worldwide applicability.
- d. Exclusion: To preserve the integrity of the synthesis, articles published in non-peer-reviewed "predatory" journals or that focused on general education without a particular language-learning component were eliminated.

3.3 Data Analysis and Synthesis Procedure: A Three-Tiered Approach

In order to extract, classify, and synthesize intricate theoretical structures into a coherent model, the study adhered to a strict, iterative qualitative procedure. To ensure methodological transparency and analytical rigor, the process was divided into three systematically executed stages:

Phase 1: Taxonomic Analysis and Thematic Coding

During the initial stage, the selected literature underwent a systematic constant comparison process. The textual data were imported into qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 12) for structured thematic coding. The coding process was conducted line-by-line to identify recurrent pedagogical patterns, interactional barriers, and structural success factors within EFL group discussions. This procedure generated primary codes such as "scaffolding techniques," "negotiation of meaning," "cognitive friction," and "participation asymmetry." To validate these themes and mitigate subjective bias, inter-coder reliability was established through peer debriefing among the research team. The validated codes were subsequently structured into a hierarchical taxonomy that isolated the "active ingredients" of interaction essential for driving collaborative learning performance (Qureshi et al., 2023).

Phase 2: Conceptual Synthesis and Cross-Theoretical Mapping

The second phase operationalized the theoretical intersections between the established frameworks. A systematic cross-theoretical mapping matrix was developed to identify points of conceptual convergence across Sociocultural Theory, Interactionist Perspectives, and Collaborative Learning. For example, the interactionist concept of "pushed output" (Soodmand Afshar, 2021) was methodologically mapped as the observable behavioral manifestation of a learner successfully navigating their Vygotskian "Zone of Proximal Development." This matrix was critical for systematically verifying how different theoretical mechanisms conceptually overlap to resolve the practical dysfunctions of unstructured classroom discussions, particularly in fostering students' critical reasoning.

Phase 3: Framework Construction and Validation

The final stage synthesized the validated taxonomy and the cross-theoretical matrix into a cohesive pedagogical architecture. This was executed through a targeted "gap-filling" procedure: the practical classroom limitations identified in Section 2.5 were systematically paired with the structural solutions derived from the theoretical synthesis in Sections 2.1–2.4. The output of this procedure is the "Integrated FGD Model." To ensure its pedagogical viability, the model underwent multiple rounds of iterative refinement by the research team, resulting in clear, actionable operational guidelines for instructional objectives, strategic role allocations, and micro-interactional protocols tailored for the EFL environment.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Reconceptualizing FGD as a Collaborative Pedagogical Model

The primary finding of this synthesis is that a “proper” Focus Group Discussion (FGD) needs to go beyond its conventional function as a straightforward educational exercise. It ought to be rethought as an organized pedagogical paradigm that serves as a hub for language, cognitive, and social development. Unlike “free-talk” sessions, this model acts as a key teaching method that enhances academic motivation (Loes, 2022) and contributes significantly to oral fluency (Abbasi & Anthony, 2024).

- a. Social Interaction: Getting through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) with the help of peers.
- b. Cognitive engagement involves encouraging students to engage in “exploratory talk” and higher-order thinking.
- c. Linguistic Development: Establishing a natural laboratory for pushing output and negotiating meaning. By including these aspects, the FGD transforms from a supporting activity into a key teaching method that reflects the complexity of communication in the real world.

4.2 Core Components of the Proposed “Integrated FGD Model”

Based on the theoretical synthesis, this study proposes a multi-dimensional framework consisting of four critical components:

4.2.1 *Phase-Based Instructional Scaffolding*

An effective FGD is a sequential process rather than a single event. Three crucial phases of scaffolding are identified by the research:

- 1) Priming, or the Pre-Discussion Phase, is an essential step in lowering cognitive load. In order to guarantee that students have the linguistic “ammunition” and conceptual background required to participate fully, it entails specific vocabulary preparation and topic induction. Integrating models like the Flipped Classroom during this priming phase can further enhance student activity within the FGD setting (Wahyuni & Ningsih, 2024). This is particularly essential in hybrid systems to maintain interactional quality and meet specific student preferences (Anabel & Simanjuntak, 2022).
- 2) The main “interactional space” where students actually exchange ideas is the During-Discussion Phase (Execution). Here, the emphasis is on sustaining momentum and making sure the conversation stays on the learning objectives.
- 3) The Consolidation Phase (Post-Discussion): This step, which entails methodical evaluation and feedback, is sometimes overlooked in conventional approaches. It enables students to absorb the mental understanding and language adjustments acquired during the exchange.

4.2.2 *Strategic Role Allocation and Accountability*

The model highlights the significance of clearly defined functional responsibilities in order to reduce the “free-rider” effect and guarantee fair participation. This role-based engagement ensures that interaction is structurally dispersed and directly fosters improvements in

speaking performance (Butarbutar & Sauhenda, 2025). Within the group, assigning certain tasks fosters a sense of personal accountability:

- 1) The facilitator keeps the discussion on course and invites individuals who are more reserved to speak up.
- 2) The Recorder/Synthesizer: Records the main points of contention and linguistic difficulties.
- 3) The presenter is in charge of explaining the group's conclusions to the larger class.
- 4) These responsibilities guarantee that contact is structurally dispersed among all participants rather than left up to chance.

4.2.3 *Micro-Interactional Patterns*

The “proper” FGD is characterized by specific types of talk that drive language acquisition. This study identifies three vital interactional patterns:

Three crucial interactional patterns are identified by this study:

- 1) Negotiation of Meaning: In order to fix communication breakdowns, students employ comprehension tests and clarification requests, specifically regarding spoken form and word parts yield higher learning gains (Afshar, 2021).
- 2) Cognitive Elaboration: Going beyond straightforward “yes/no” responses to include thorough reasoning and explanations.
- 3) Peer-Mediated Correction: This type of “collective scaffolding” involves students giving one another quick, low-stress feedback on language accuracy.

4.2.4 *The Reflective-Evaluative Loop*

The Reflective Evaluation is the last part of the model. This is a metacognitive activity rather than just an evaluation of “what was learned”. By recognizing the link between theory and practice and receiving constructive feedback, students develop the reflective thinking and critical reasoning skills necessary for contemporary language proficiency (Abidin et al., 2025; Farahian & Parhamnia, 2021). Students become more conscious of their own learning process by thinking back on their communication style and areas of difficulty. Because of this loop, the FGD is no longer a one-time exercise but rather an ongoing cycle of improvement in which each session informs and improves the subsequent one.

5 Conclusion

To promote profound linguistic and cognitive development, this study concludes that the conventional, unstructured approach to Forum Group Discussions (FGDs) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is inadequate. Instead, a clear transition to an organized pedagogical model based on Collaborative Learning Theory, Sociocultural Theory, and Interactionist Perspectives is required. By combining these frameworks, the study proposes an “Integrated FGD Model” that rethinks discussion as a core mediational tool, where language serves both as a social tool and a cognitive goal of learning, rather than as a secondary activity.

The effectiveness of the model is based on four key components: a reflective-evaluative loop that fosters metacognitive awareness; a three-phase instructional scaffolding (pre-discussion priming, interactional execution, and post-discussion reflection) to manage cognitive load; strategic role allocation (e.g., Facilitator, Recorder, Presenter) to ensure individual accountability and prevent “social loafing”; and the encouragement of micro-interactional patterns like the negotiation of meaning and pushed output. This study

concludes that by going beyond “aimless chatter” and toward a theoretically aligned and carefully structured interactional environment, educators can effectively bridge the gap between theoretical grammar and real communicative ability. In addition to giving EFL students the higher-order thinking and teamwork abilities required for global involvement in the twenty-first century, this will establish a strong basis for future empirical validation in a variety of teaching contexts.

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