



## Korean EFL University Students' Experiences in an Extracurricular Tutoring Program

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### ABSTRACT

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This study explores Korean EFL university students' lived experiences in an extracurricular tutoring program. Using a phenomenological research framework, 59 students' weekly and final reflective journals and in-depth interviews with seven students were analyzed to determine the essence of their experiences. By coding the data into categories and sub-categories, three major themes and 12 sub-themes were derived to describe participants' motives for program participation, collaborative learning strategies, and outcomes. In groups, students participated in the extracurricular tutoring program to achieve a shared goal with the support of one another. Their collaborative learning was mediated by using a variety of strategies: making ground rules, establishing and revising learning plans, sharing materials and information, using mobile technology, developing ideas through discussion, giving and receiving feedback, and teaching group members. These strategies were conducive to students' learning, resulting in their increased English proficiency, acquisition of English learning methods, and confidence in learning English. Central to this study is the idea that collaborative learning is an important process and mechanism for successful English learning and competency development. The findings from this research provide pedagogical insights and implications for learner-centered approaches to English education.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The waves of the Fourth Industrial Revolution have brought paradigm shifts in higher education. Responding to the new demands in today's society, universities have made great efforts to improve the quality of education. The World Economic Forum reported that skills such as complex problem-solving, creativity, emotional intelligence, and coordinating with others are required for future jobs (Gray, 2016). With this in mind, Korean universities have established core competencies that reflect the values of

each institution and have reshaped curricula accordingly (H. J. Park, 2018). In addition, many universities have introduced extracurricular programs, which provide a practical application of these changes. Those programs include a variety of competitions and contests, tutoring, mentoring, and learning community programs (H. J. Kim, 2016). Compared to regular classes, extracurricular programs can provide better opportunities to raise and develop students' skills, in that extracurricular activities encourage students to make an active contribution to their own development, highlighting variety and flexibility (Chisiu, 2013). In par-

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ticular, extracurricular activities provide an opportunity for collaborative learning. Today's students need to be able to work in teams and make decisions collaboratively, as society requires a more interdisciplinary competence to solve the complex problems at hand. In this regard, many Korean universities have implemented various types of learning communities through their Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTL) (M. H. Yeom, S. Park, & J. W. Oh, 2012). Learning communities mean "study group" or "tutoring" in which students voluntarily participate (E. Y. Kim & A. Kim, 2013, p. 92).

Despite the increased interest in the importance of extracurricular collaborative learning aiming to reinforce students' core competencies, there is scant research as to how English learners interact to facilitate learning and how their group dynamics work in fostering their competencies required in the present and future society. In addition, most university tutoring programs for English study are linked with regular English classes (K. O. Jeong, 2011; S. Jung, 2016; K. A. Yu, 2016, 2017, 2018). These programs are implemented to compensate teacher-centered English education, providing students with more time and opportunities to practice English. However, it is imperative that today's education platform provide a way for students to explore what they need to learn for themselves and to offer space for them to discuss how the exploration can be facilitated. Investigating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students' experiences in student-initiated extracurricular tutoring programs, without the teacher's intervention, can provide important clues to the learner-centered teaching and learning approaches, which have been emphasized in line with competency-based educational goals.

Therefore, this study focuses on EFL university students' voluntary collaborative learning instead of teacher-directed, collaborative learning in class. To be precise, the aim of this study is to examine Korean EFL university students' lived experiences in an extracurricular tutoring program. By exploring their common experiences and uncovering the deep meanings submerged in them, educational implications for learner-centered, collaborative learning in English education will be drawn. This empirical study contributes to existing literature of tutoring programs in Korean universities and yields a deepened understanding of students' motives and engagement in the collaborative learning process.

The central research question that guided this study is: What are the experiences of collaborative learning for Korean EFL university students who have participated in an extracurricular tutoring program?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Collaborative Learning in English Education

Collaborative learning is defined as a situation "in

which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together" (Dillenbourg, 1999, p. 1). In a classroom setting, it is viewed as "an instructional method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal" (Gokhale, 1995, p. 22). In other words, it is a pedagogical approach that strengthens the abilities of each and all learners as it promotes active interaction among learners of diverse abilities and backgrounds. According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction is a primary element in learning. He asserted, in his theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), learning occurs when learners get help from more advanced peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Pedagogically, engaging students in collaborative learning constitutes a process where learning, especially foreign language learning, is mediated in a social context.

Within this sociocultural perspective, the importance and benefits of implementing collaborative or cooperative learning have been recognized in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Azizinezhad, Hashemi, & Darvishi, 2013; Buitrago, 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2015). The terms collaborative learning and cooperative learning are often used interchangeably (Nunan, 1992). However, some researchers have claimed that the two terms should be distinguished (Oxford, 1997; Roschelle & Teasley, 1995). They argued, in a cooperative learning setting, activities are more structured, and specific roles are assigned to students by the teacher. In addition, cooperative work is "accomplished by the division of labor among participants..." while collaborative work is done by the "... mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve the problem together" (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995, p. 70). The term collaboration is more appropriate for this research as students' activities in the extracurricular tutoring program have a lower degree of structure and require less individual accountability.

Collaborative learning has educational benefits in both the cognitive and affective domains (Buitrago, 2017; Cockrell, Hughes-Caplow, & Donaldson, 2000; Liang, Mohan, & Early, 1998; Nayan, Shafie, Mansor, Maesin, & Osman, 2010). In the cognitive domain, positive academic outcomes are achieved by helping to better understand certain concepts and retain knowledge. From an affective perspective, collaborative learning enhances students' motivation, autonomy, and self-esteem. Regarding English as a second or foreign language education, many studies have claimed that collaborative/cooperative learning and/or group work have many advantages and positive effects (Azizinezhad, Hashemi, & Darvishi, 2013; Chang, 2010; Sharif et al., 2012; Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014). Collaborative learning can be conducive to English learning, in that it "generates interactive language, offers an embracing affective climate, promotes learning responsibility and autonomy, and is a step toward individualized instruction" (Brown, 2001, p. 177).

## 2. English Tutoring Programs in a Korean University Context

Along with the government's budgetary support for university education, many Korean universities have implemented learning communities such as study groups or tutoring programs through their CTLs (S. Jung, 2016; I. S. Kim, 2010; M. H. Yeom & H. Kim, 2008). The programs are geared to the improvement of students' basic learning abilities and the creation of an academic atmosphere (K. A. Yu, 2016, 2018). Tutoring is the act of teaching and learning that happens when tutors aid peers' learning. Usually, tutors who have completed a specific course with a high score help other students who need academic help for the course (E. Hwang, 2008). Studies relating to the programs are mainly about their effectiveness on students' academic achievements, and the results demonstrate that the programs have positively affected students' academic achievements (H. Ahn, Y. Park, K. Kim, & M. Jang, 2016; M. H. Yeom, S. Park, & J. W. Oh, 2012). In addition, learning community programs can contribute to students' self-directed learning and problem solving as well as academic achievement (S. H. Park, 2015).

Tutoring programs specifically for English learning have not received much attention in the literature; yet, of the limited research, some studies have claimed that outside-class study groups or extracurricular English tutoring programs promote EFL university students' academic achievement (H. K. Kim, 2013; K. A. Yu, 2016, 2017, 2018; S. Jung, 2016). In an EFL context where students do not have enough exposure to the target language in and outside the class, extracurricular tutoring programs can provide students with opportunities for extended learning, resulting in academic achievement. K. A. Yu's (2018) research indicated that students' English test scores improved every semester after participating in an eight-week basic English tutoring program. K. A. Yu's (2016) study also revealed that tutees' basic English test scores and the grades in their General English course improved. The tutees with lower grades showed a greater improvement in grades as a result of their tutoring experience. In both studies, the teacher chose tutors and tutees and provided learning materials. H. K. Kim's (2013) study showed statistically significant differences between the cooperative and the independent study groups in TOEIC reading comprehension and vocabulary quizzes. The cooperative study group showed better achievement in Parts 6 and 7 which contain long passages and more complicated questions compared to Part 5. This study revealed that the cooperative group showed higher achievement by constructing and sharing knowledge through interaction. Similarly, K. O. Jeong (2011) discussed that English reading programs, using reciprocal peer-tutoring, helped students to understand difficult concepts and develop learning strategies.

Despite a growing body of research on the operation and outcomes of tutoring programs, studies on students' perceptions and experiences have remained underex-

plored. S. Jung's (2016) study investigated university students' experiences in tutoring-based study groups. In this study, students acknowledged improvement in their English ability and comprehension of the target content and developed positive attitudes toward learning. Moreover, they could build and expand human networks and promote a sense of community through experiences in the study group. Although the tutoring programs were implemented in line with the emphasis of the educational paradigm shift towards learners' self-directed learning, most programs investigated were designed by the teacher and connected with credit-bearing classes. Thus, more studies on student-initiated study groups or tutoring programs are needed in order to address the new educational demands of learner-centered education.

## III. METHOD

### 1. Context of the Study

This study was conducted at a university located in the central part of Korea. The CTL of this university has run three types of extracurricular tutoring programs with the aim of promoting students' self-directed learning. Three types of tutoring programs are divided depending on their objectives. The first type of tutoring is geared towards students who are studying a shared course. Students can choose a major or liberal arts course to study and help one another to raise grades in class. The second type of tutoring is for students who focus on extracurricular activities or goals such as preparing to obtain a certificate or license, working on tasks for competitions or contests, or improving foreign language abilities. The third type is designed for marginalized groups of students such as academically low performing students and international students. Among the three types, this research focused on the students who had participated in the second type of tutoring, especially the ones who are collaboratively learning English. In other words, this study focused on English learning where interaction is important and sought to understand the meaning of participants' learning experiences in a relatively free learning environment.

At the beginning of each semester, the CTL advertises the tutoring programs by sending out both online and offline flyers and SNS messages. Participation was voluntary, but students had to submit an application stating their motives for participation. In addition, they needed to outline a plan for achieving their goals. Each group selected was required to submit weekly reflective journals, and midterm and final journals. The program ran for 10 weeks each semester, and students had two more weeks to finish their final journals. In the extracurricular tutoring program, the students were encouraged to self-direct their studies and carry out their plans. All groups of students performed their own work without any teacher intervention; however, they could consult with the researcher in charge of the program when necessary. The researcher monitored students' weekly reflective journals and

contacted students only when they did not submit them or there was an issue such as student withdrawal.

## 2. Data Collection and Analysis

Qualitative methods, specifically a phenomenological approach, were employed for this study. The focus of phenomenological research is to describe “the essence of a lived phenomenon” (Creswell, 2009, p. 78). By describing what the participants experienced in common, the researcher can investigate the possible deeper meaning of that experience. Qualitative research methods are effective in understanding a phenomenon in which little is known and more could be learned from the participants through exploration (Creswell, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Since there is a scarcity of literature on students’ experiences in student-initiated extra-curricular tutoring programs, a qualitative research method was chosen for this study to capture the lived experiences of the participants.

This was a sequential, two-phase research project. First, the researcher collected and analyzed the data from the application and reflective journals written by 17 groups of 59 students who had participated in the program from March 2017 to August 2018. In 2017, six groups of 17 students participated in the program for English study in the spring semester, and seven groups of 27 students in the fall semester. In the spring semester of 2018, four groups of 15 students participated in the program for English study. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants.

**TABLE 1**  
Demographic Information of Participants

Major	Sex	Freshman (n)	Sophomore (n)	Junior (n)	Senior (n)	Total (n)
Humanities	Male	3	2	4	2	11
	Female	6	7	3	13	29
	sub-total	9	9	7	15	40
Natural Science	Male	1	0	4	1	6
	Female	3	0	7	3	13
	sub-total	4	0	11	4	19
Total		13	9	18	19	59

The participants had to submit weekly reflective journals online. The CTL provided a sample form which allowed the students to write about study content, methods, reflections on these, along with study time and place. The journals, as a rigorous research instrument, provided qualitative evidence of students’ experiences in collaborative learning. The researcher could explore the complexity of participants’ collaborative learning by identifying how their activities were conducted and what the experience meant to them. The journals described the discursive meanings regarding the formation of relationships among team members in learning experiences, decision-making processes, the advantages and difficulties of collaborative learning, and the learning outcomes.

After reading and analyzing the student journals, the researcher conducted focus group interviews with seven students divided into two groups (see Table 2). The purpose

of these interviews was to gain an in-depth understanding of their group dynamics and processes that were difficult to obtain solely from written journals. Two groups were chosen for the focus group interview by convenience sampling. The students were friendly and enthusiastic about the program and agreed to be interviewed. The focus group interviews were conducted in Korean at the CTL study room with an open framework which enabled conversational communication between the researcher and the participants. The interviews involved two sections with specific prompts. The first section elicited participants’ general perceptions of English learning. The second section focused on their experiences in the program. Questions pertained to their motives for collaborative learning, roles, plans and goals, strategies and materials, and learning processes and consequences.

**TABLE 2**  
Interviewee Information

Participants	Pseudonyms	Major	Academic year	Gender
Student 1	Bora	Tourism Management	Senior	Female
Student 2	Hyerin	Tourism Management	Senior	Female
Student 3	Minchae	Tourism Management	Senior	Female
Student 4	Suyeon	Tourism Management	Freshman	Female
Student 5	Nayoung	Tourism Management	Freshman	Female
Student 6	Junghyun	Tourism Management	Freshman	Male
Student 7	Yongjin	Tourism Management	Freshman	Male

Each interview lasted for about two hours, yielding 223 minutes of audio-recorded data. As soon as the interviews were completed, all the recorded data were transcribed into text for analysis. Through focus group interviews, the researcher wanted to find out participants’ honest feelings and attitudes about group work. In addition, the researcher intended to use the focus group interview results to triangulate the data from written journals. Deeper understanding of students’ experiences through focus group interviews could enrich the discussion of this study and shed light on how to implement student-centered instruction in both curricular and extracurricular contexts.

Using Moustakas’ (1994) phenomenological method, rigor in validity was established through data triangulation, member checking, and debriefing with the research participants. For analysis of the data, the researcher continuously reread the students’ reflective journals and transcribed interview data. She revisited the data repeatedly and tried to avoid prejudgments through the process of epoché, an approach in which a researcher sets aside his/her views of the phenomenon and focuses on statements supplied by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The results of the study began to emerge by classifying the content that the participants had described repeatedly or with emphasis and what the researcher found meaningful. As a result, 186 significant statements were coded and clustered into themes. As the research progressed, the data were stratified into themes and sub-themes. Finally, three major themes and 12 sub-themes were derived to describe how participants reported their experiences in collaborative learning for English study. Table 3 shows the summary of findings which will be discussed in the next section.

**TABLE 3**  
Summary of Derived Themes

Major themes	Sub-themes
Motives for participation in collaborative learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· A shared goal</li> <li>· Importance of peer support</li> </ul>
Learning strategies in collaborative learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Making ground rules</li> <li>· Establishing and revising learning plans</li> <li>· Sharing materials and information</li> <li>· Using mobile technology</li> <li>· Developing ideas through discussion</li> <li>· Giving and receiving feedback</li> <li>· Teaching group members</li> </ul>
Learning outcomes in collaborative learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Increased English proficiency</li> <li>· Acquisition of English learning methods</li> <li>· Confidence in studying English</li> </ul>

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Motives for Participation in Collaborative Learning

#### 1) A Shared Goal

According to the data collected from participants' application documents, five major reasons were discovered for program participation. Out of the five specific reasons, four reasons were to study for formal English examinations such as Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), TOEIC Speaking, and Oral Proficiency Interview - computer (OPIc). As Table 4 explains, the most prevalent reason was to study TOEIC. About 60% of all participants, regardless of their major and academic year, reported that they took part in the program to study TOEIC with peers.

**TABLE 4**  
Motivation for Participation in the Program

Objectives	Groups (n)	Students (n)	Percentage (%)
TOEIC	11	36	61.02
TOEFL	2	7	11.86
TOEIC Speaking	1	4	6.78
OPIc	2	8	13.56
Business English	1	4	6.78
Total	17	59	100

Data from reflective journals and focus group interviews enabled the researcher to more deeply understand the participants' shared motives in relation to their recognition of the importance of English ability. Most of the students were studying for an official English test to prepare for employment. Apparently, participants' motives were shaped in a sociocultural context where English plays an essential role in the job market and is part of the university curriculum. Students' investment in English needs to be understood in reference to social context and their multiple and changing identities (Peirce, 1995). Students' motives for program participation are clearly illustrated in

the following excerpts.

Nowadays, having a certified foreign language exam score is essential in the job market. In particular, a TOEIC score is required when we apply for any job. Studying TOEIC is our common goal and is troublesome. Our goal is to score over 900 on the TOEIC test. (Reflective Journal, Group 8)

Due to the nature of my department, which is the department of the Internet of Things, learning English is essential. It covers technology from foreign countries so related books and research papers are written in English with few accurate translations. What's more, major conferences are held in English-speaking countries. Thus, I need to learn English to deeply understand my major. (The researcher asked why that person chose to study TOEIC instead of reading books related to their major.) It is because we first thought we needed basic English ability to be able to read books written in English. As we are freshmen, we have little knowledge of our major too. By studying TOEIC, we can learn English vocabulary and grammar. (Interview, Nayoung)

As mentioned above, each group had a shared goal in terms of English learning. Some groups planned to study for formal English exams, and other groups wanted to improve their English ability in the process of preparing for exams. It is interesting to note that formal English examinations, such as TOEIC or OPIc, are dominant motives for and means of studying English. Consequently, students participated in the tutoring program to collaboratively work on and achieve their shared goal. The establishment of a clear group goal motivating their collaborative learning is worth further consideration.

#### 2) Importance of Peer Support

Another primary reason for program participation for collaborative learning is that students want company and support from each other when studying. Peer support is a powerful source in motivating students to take ownership of their own learning. According to participants' reflective journals, many acknowledged the importance of peer support. They confessed that they had given up studying English before they joined this program. They felt that learning English was a long and difficult journey to continue without proper support and motivation. By working collaboratively with peers who had a common goal, they could make continuous progress. The following excerpts illustrate how students felt about peer support.

I have never studied TOEIC before, so I needed help. I think there is a limit to studying alone. I feel lonely and isolated when I study alone. I want to study in a supportive environment with close friends I always meet, and make good progress in TOEIC learning. (Application Document, Group 10)

Whenever I prepared for the TOEIC test alone, I gave up half-way through, so I participated in this program to study with friends who also study TOEIC. We worked

towards achieving the same goal, which was getting a higher TOEIC score. We helped and supported each other. I thought I might discourage other members if I missed a meeting or did not preview materials for each week. I felt more responsible for studying in a group than alone. Finally, all our TOEIC scores improved. I would have given up without my team members' encouragement and support. (Reflective Journal, Group 14)

As clearly indicated above, students realized that they were able to achieve their goals as a group more successfully than they would have alone. Achieving a higher TOEIC score was a shared goal and distressed many participants. However, feelings of solidarity and consolation enabled them to become more responsible and to continue trying. Receiving peer support was motivation for successful collaborative learning as well as motivation for program participation. Encouraging peer support instead of competition in English classes can play a key role in helping students to be more successful in their learning (Brown, 1994).

## 2. Learning Strategies in Collaborative Learning

### 1) Making Ground Rules

Addressing specific strategies that EFL university students employ in the tutoring program is helpful in identifying how they collaborate to facilitate their English learning. First, every team mentioned that they made their own ground rules in the beginning of the program to structure their meeting and improve engagement. As a form of learning contract, their explicit rules helped to hold students engaged and responsible for their study. This is clearly suggested in the following excerpts.

We made our own rules to follow. We decided how often we should meet and who should be the leader each week. We discussed and set the amount of a suitable task for each week, too. (Reflective Journal, Group 2)

One of our rules was to leave a thank-you message when receiving learning materials from somebody through a group chat (via a mobile instant messaging application). This was to show appreciation and encourage sharing materials and information among ourselves. (Interview, Hyerin)

As indicated above, making rules was an important initial step in collaborative learning. Although all groups were forged by themselves, the bonds and motivation strengthened in the process of making their own rules. The rules agreed on by all group members could ensure that all members had the same expectations regarding goals and implementation. In addition, the group rules encouraged and motivated their learning, enabling the groups to achieve more than the individuals would have been able to on their own (Chiriach, 2014).

### 2) Establishing and Revising Learning Plans

After determining what to study and setting a goal, students established more specific plans for their study. Many groups reported in their journals that they embarked on their group work by diagnosing their GPAs or TOEIC scores. If they did not have TOEIC scores at that time, they took a TOEIC mock test or a vocabulary test to determine where to start. Then, they decided on learning materials and areas to focus on. They also discussed the appropriate amount of work for each week and the hours for each meeting. Here are some comments with respect to their plans.

We coordinated the curriculum together. On the first day, there was a slight disagreement in deciding on the number of tasks and the length of study time. However, we adjusted our opinions and were able to create an academic atmosphere through multiple discussions. (Reflective Journal, Group 4)

In the first week, we solved the TOEIC mock test in order to understand our level and set the goal and direction of learning. Compared to Parts 5 and 6, we felt difficulties in the reading passages of Part 7 and could not answer the questions in time. We thought we should focus more on Part 7, especially the vocabulary contained there. (Reflective Journal, Group 11)

We often talked about our progress and difficulties. This week, some members mentioned we need to slow down so we don't feel like this meeting is a burden. So, we decided to reduce weekly tasks and added some review time. (Reflective Journal, Group 14)

As stated above, students sometimes had to revise their plans. In particular, during the midterm exam week, students focused on review instead of covering a new chapter or material. Revising plans through group discussions helped participants continue their study without giving up. In regular teacher-centered classes, students usually follow the teacher's instruction and plans rather than receiving opportunities to set their own goals and learning plans. This study suggests that involving students in the process of planning and monitoring their own learning is important to foster ownership of their learning and encourage self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975).

### 3) Sharing Materials and Information

The ability to organize, utilize, bring together information across disciplines, and share this with others in a group is one of the important competencies that today's students need to have. With respect to the importance of this competency, the data suggest that most groups shared learning materials and information extensively. They mentioned that they shared materials or website links that they found helpful in understanding certain concepts, and it was an advantage of collaborative learning. In addition, they shared tips for taking exams, especially test-taking strategies for the updated version of the TOEIC Listening

and Reading Test. Here are some comments from the participants.

One of us had taken the new TOEIC test twice. So, the rest of us learned from her how it is different from the old one. Although we could get this information from the Internet, it was more helpful to listen to her lived experiences. She also shared her know-how for taking exams in a real setting. (The researcher asked for examples.) Like, if multiple passages in Part 7 are too difficult to understand, it is better to focus on questions in other parts rather than spending too much time on them. She also said some questions were tricky, so we would need to be careful with synonyms. We also shared each other's strategies to efficiently memorize vocabulary. (Interview, Suyeon)

TOEIC Speaking Part 4 involves responding to questions using information provided within 15 to 30 seconds. I felt it was difficult reading and understanding information that quickly, so I focused on this part, and to practice a lot, we decided to bring materials such as conference schedules and English newspapers as well as TOEIC textbooks. It was helpful to see a lot of examples. (*The researcher asked if they had done something similar in regular classes*) Umm, not really. In regular English classes, I'm not that active in sharing because I feel the class atmosphere is very competitive. (Interview, Bora)

Notably, the act of mutual exchange and sharing knowledge and information increased students' interaction and motivation towards learning. As it was an extracurricular program and they were intimate friends, students seemed less competitive and less worried about their grades. Usually in a Korean university context, standard university courses are graded on a relative curve (Finch, 2002); thus, students tend to be competitive. However, by working together in the extracurricular program, students realized that knowledge is more useful and meaningful when shared. Since group work is an important practice that promotes the value of collaboration to succeed together, both curricular and extracurricular classes should increase group work opportunities.

#### 4) Using Mobile Technology

Mobile technology made collaborative learning more convenient for participants. When they had difficulties adjusting the time and place for meetings, they decided to use group conference calls or chats instead of canceling the meetings. Videoconferencing is a synchronous, interactive software tool that enables transferring voice, video, and data between two or more people (Wiesemes & Wang, 2010). It was used among some groups of students as an advantageous way to connect with each other despite time and space constraints. The participants' use of mobile technology is illustrated in the following excerpts.

In many cases, it was difficult to adjust the time for meetings as we have differing schedules. So, one of us suggested online conferencing, and we loved it so much. We held group voice chatting through the mobile instant

messaging application. It helped us motivate each other and save time. (Reflective Journal, Group 13)

It was fun to hold video chats between us. Also, we shared snapshots of parts of our textbooks and discussed them. We also shared learning materials using mobile phones. It was as interactive as in-person meetings and even more stress-free sometimes. Sending funny emojis to each other was fun too. (Reflective Journal, Group 15)

As we promised to study a lot even when we were alone, we sent study photos to each other more than twice a week through KakaoTalk. It was so encouraging and sometimes even led to question and answer time. We sent pop quizzes to each other. (Reflective Journal, Group 17)

As indicated above, mobile-assisted learning could enrich the quality of collaborative learning. Data collected demonstrate that mobile technology can bring students together in new ways to take advantage of the power of collaborative learning. In addition to web-based collaborative learning platforms such as Wikis or Google Docs (DeWitt, Alias, & Siraj, 2014; K. O. Jeong, 2016), mobile learning environments have the potential to foster effective collaborative learning (Fu & Hwang, 2018). More importantly, participants' attitudes towards mobile technology were very positive.

#### 5) Developing Ideas through Discussion

Collaborative learning is a process whereby all group members add to discussion and learning. Most participants who studied English speaking or writing as a group revealed that group discussions helped them develop ideas and have new perspectives. First, they wrote a script or an essay on their own. They then brought it to the meeting and shared it to get feedback on each other's ideas. The discussions which occurred in the meetings were good opportunities for students to reflect and develop their answers. This is clearly indicated in the following excerpts.

All of my team members had difficulties writing TOEFL essays. First, we just tried to write essays to answer practice questions, but we realized this did not help, so we had to find another method. We came up with the idea of completing one essay together. We picked one topic we felt was easy and interesting. Then, we started brainstorming ideas by drawing a mind map. We gathered more and more ideas and finally structured the essay. (Reflective Journal, Group 6)

By comparing and discussing the different answers provided by team members, our answers became more creative. (Reflective Journal, Group 12)

We helped each other to improve the quality of our written answers. In completing one of my essays, I wanted to check if my opinions sounded reasonable to other people. I asked my team members to read it and give me feedback. I agreed to some of their comments, but not all of them. Nevertheless, I appreciated all their ideas because it helped me broaden my

perspectives. (Reflective Journal, Group 16)

Here, data clearly show that participants were open-minded and active in discussing their work. They found that engaging in the discussion resulted in qualitative improvements to their work. More specifically, peer feedback by multiple members provided students with a variety of perspectives. By comparing their answers to others, they saw the possibility of different answers. Besides that, group discussion can promote and improve learning, as it offers students opportunities to articulate and defend their thoughts (Laal & Laal, 2012).

## 6) Giving and Receiving Feedback

Providing feedback was an important collaborative learning strategy that was employed throughout the participants' learning process. As Wang (2014) argued, feedback through interaction among students is a critical collaborative learning strategy. The benefits of peer feedback have been acknowledged by some researchers (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Moore & Teather, 2013). Feedback in the form of constructivist help can have a positive influence on learning (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Participants of this study acknowledged the importance of feedback, reporting that constructive comments from other students were valuable contributions to their learning. The following excerpts illustrate how students gave and received feedback and how they felt about it.

We created two teams in our group of four members. Then, we checked each other's accents and intonations and gave/received feedback. We were shy at first, but it was helpful at the end. (Reflective Journal, Group 1)

We gave feedback to each other about grammatically incorrect areas of essay writing. It was very helpful. (Reflective Journal, Group 9)

Although it is a tutoring program, we all gave comments to others. I am a tutor, but I know I need more work on TOEIC. I sometimes make mistakes too when solving the questions. Getting my friends' (tutees') feedback is helpful to me, too. (Interview, Junghyun)

Here, data clearly demonstrate the positive effects of feedback. Peer feedback in a stress-free learning environment enabled interactive learning and helped participants feel appreciated and supported. This suggests some implications for regular classes. Students need to feel comfortable giving and receiving feedback in classroom activities.

## 7) Teaching Group Members

According to data concerning the participants' reflection on their successful collaborative learning, the most powerful and frequently answered comment was that they learned by teaching. Peer teaching refers to "a variety of

peer tutoring in which students take turns in the role of teacher" (Falchikov, 2001, p. 5). It is recognized that the most effective way to learn is to teach - to explain something to someone else. Through explanations, elaborations, questions and answers, students can construct, articulate, and modify knowledge. In the collaborative learning context, tutors can learn more than their tutees (Duran, 2017; Topping, 1996). This is supported by the following tutors' comments.

In today's meeting, I got confused at one point where I was explaining some grammar points to my members. I simply thought I knew the concept, but teaching was difficult. For the next meeting, I thought I should check whether I perfectly knew what I was going to explain. I also thought I should practice how I was going to explain it. (*This student wrote the following comments in his next week's journal*) After reviewing what to cover for this week more carefully before the meeting, it was much easier to explain and answer the members' questions. (Reflective Journal, Group 2)

As a tutor, tutoring was a valuable experience. I truly felt in charge and learned more by teaching. Even my TOEIC score improved. (Reflective Journal, Group 17)

Although there were tutors and tutees in groups, participants sometimes alternated roles by sections of the task or certain topics. Any group members who had taught a specific topic to other members had productive experiences. This is clearly revealed in some students' reflective journals.

Today, we studied passive voice, verb tense, and auxiliary verbs. We decided to divide sections to study and teach each other. Based on what we had studied, we practiced writing sentences. It was helpful because we could have clearer ideas about English grammar. As we each had different strengths and weaknesses, we were able to help each other more effectively by teaching each other. (Reflective Journal, Group 8)

I realized that I studied a lot for this meeting. To more actively participate in group discussions and teach junior students, I read TOEFL reading passages in that week twice and searched related information on the Internet. I also read the passages one more time before the meeting. (Reflective Journal, Group 16)

Indeed, participants seemed to feel responsible and motivated in terms of their own learning through peer scaffolding. According to Storch (2002), among various patterns of interaction such as collaborative, dominant-dominant, dominant-passive, and expert-novice, it is highly probable that peer scaffolding takes place in collaborative or expert-novice patterns of interaction. Students in the two patterns focused on learning processes whereas students in other patterns tended to seek positive opinions on their work. Her study implies that learners should be mutual scaffolders who give and receive support both as an expert and a collaborative learner.

### 3. Learning Outcomes in Collaborative Learning

#### 1) Increased English Proficiency

Self-assessment is a crucial process of learner-centered language teaching and learning (Nunan, 1988). It increases EFL learners' self-efficacy and motivation (Baleghizadeh & Masoun, 2013). According to the data, participants felt their English proficiency increased at the end of the program. All groups affirmed that their goals were achieved although some groups did not set a specific goal which could be numerically measured. The achievement they felt in terms of their English proficiency is clearly written in participants' reflective journals and supported by interviews with students. Here are some examples.

All of our TOEIC scores improved. (Reflective Journal, Group 2)

I received a good score in the OPIc test. (Reflective Journal, Group 3)

My English vocabulary skills increased. (Reflective Journal, Group 7)

I got an English score that meets my graduation requirements. (Reflective Journal, Group 10)

My final exam score in the English class improved. I think it's because I learned the basics of English grammar in my group. (Reflective Journal, Group 11)

I think my English improved in general. I'm not just talking about my improved TOEIC score. I understand English better than before. (Interview, Yongjin)

#### 2) Acquisition of English Learning Methods

Enhancing learning strategies and methods helps students learn a foreign language successfully (Montano-Gonzalez, 2017). Data suggest that most of the students learned how to approach English learning through participation in the program. By working in a group, they could experience how other group members studied and how they made progress. As a result, collaborative learning helped the participants become more effective learners. Participants' acquisition of English learning methods is clearly indicated in the following excerpts.

I learned that there are a variety of approaches to studying TOEIC. (Reflective Journal, Group 11)

I learned about this tutoring program while I was struggling in a regular TOEIC class. It was hard to study TOEIC alone, so I was happy to study with my friends through this program. I learned practical skills to solve TOEIC problems by studying in a group. I also learned how to recall vocabulary. I still feel TOEIC is difficult, but I know how to study for it now. (Reflective Journal, Group 13)

I believe the skills and habits I obtained from the program will benefit me even after the program. (Reflective Journal, Group 17)

#### 3) Confidence in Studying English

The major finding of the study indicates that extra-curricular collaborative learning can facilitate students' motivation and confidence in English learning. Students felt less pressure in learning English in the extracurricular tutoring program compared to formal classroom settings, and this built confidence. The affective domain is a very important factor in successful second and foreign language learning (Brown, 1994). Students' confidence in learning English is strongly linked to their performance and improvement. Furthermore, EFL students can become more aware of their weaknesses and strengths by making mistakes in a collaborative learning context (Buitrago, 2017). The following are some participants' comments reflecting on the affective aspect.

I had a lot of fears about English, but studying in a group of my peers was not exactly like studying in the classroom. I could ask any questions whenever I needed help, and there was plenty of talking. I learned that English learning can be fun. (Reflective Journal, Group 4)

I think teamwork is really important. Working together taught us a lot - especially confidence. Sometimes some of us had to wait till other students took time to understand some difficult readings, but we did not complain. Instead, we supported each other by giving each other hints and some explanations. Also, we made a lot of mistakes but did not feel bad at all because we could learn from the mistakes. I'm not afraid of English anymore. (Interview, Minchae)

Participants' comments on their learning outcomes demonstrate that they have experienced academic, cognitive, and affective learning achievements. According to the data, most of the participants stated that their interactions in collaborative learning were pathways to enjoying English learning, and learning how to study English better, in addition to actually improving their English ability. Their experiences suggest that they will not give up studying English but will continue to achieve higher goals by taking advantage of their collaborative learning strategies and improved confidence.

### V. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This empirical research sought to understand the meaning of Korean EFL university students' experiences when they collaboratively study for a shared goal. The essence of the participants' experiences points to the fact that collaborative learning is an important process and mechanism for successful English learning. Students in groups participated in the extracurricular tutoring program

to achieve a shared goal with the support of one another. Their collaborative learning was mediated by using a variety of strategies: making ground rules, establishing and revising learning plans, sharing materials and information, using mobile technology, developing ideas through discussion, giving and receiving feedback, and teaching group members. These strategies were conducive to students' learning, resulting in their increased English proficiency, acquisition of English learning methods, and confidence in learning English.

This study has a few implications for both curricular and extracurricular English education. First, this study asserts the importance of learner autonomy in English education. As this study focused on students' voluntary participation in the program without teacher intervention, learner autonomy played an important role in the learning experience. In the program, students made their own decisions about what and how they would learn. They autonomously chose a study topic and a book to study with as well as when and where to meet. In addition, they were actively involved in the processes of planning, implementing, monitoring, and reflecting on learning. In the context of foreign language learning, in particular, learning should be more autonomous as one should construct meaning rather than transmitting it in order to interact with others from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, it is important that language learners should be provided with collaborative and self-directed learning opportunities (Buitrago, 2017). In English education where learners' passive role has been emphasized, Korean English learners need self-directed learning opportunities to take the initiative "... in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes" (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). Self-directed learning opportunities can increase English learners' autonomy and motivation, and as a result, they can cultivate confidence in English learning through developing their own learning strategies. Thus, universities or educational institutions need to be intentional about encouraging students to form study groups. In regular classrooms, English teachers should make efforts to adopt student-centered approaches that encourage collaboration among students. They can also encourage students to participate in extracurricular English programs held by the CTL or relevant departments at each university.

Second, collaborative learning can foster English learners' competencies such as coordinating with others, negotiation and cognitive flexibility, problem-solving, and creativity. In the 21st century, students need not only the ability to understand given English texts, but also the ability to use English to solve complex problems and create new knowledge. Along with the new educational paradigm, the field of English language teaching has stressed the importance of promoting problem-solving approaches and discussed practical ways to implement them into teaching (Badger, 2018; Doghonadze & Gorgiladze, 2008). Real life problem-solving requires various com-

petences as well as knowledge and involves interaction and collaboration among learners. Students often express anxiety and frustration when they need to work in groups for problem-solving tasks or oral presentations. A few participants of this study also expressed some of the difficulties they had, such as scheduling meetings and making decisions concerning the appropriate number of weekly tasks and the length of study time. However, group-based learning has potential to foster problem-solving competencies that future employment requires. This study suggests that students articulated their goal, emphasized individual accountability, and controlled their learning speed and strategy for the group's success. They encouraged each other for better results and used proper materials and tools such as mobile technology. They shared and negotiated their plans and strategies. In addition, they learned that their self-directed learning can deepen their knowledge, and new ideas can be put forward through collaboration. Such experiences can lead to students' competency development as well as improvements in their language skills.

Finally, English teachers should develop strategies for maximizing learners' group dynamics. Group dynamics refer to "the influential actions, processes, and changes that occur within and between groups over time" (Forsyth, 2010, p. 2). The attitude and behavior an individual brings to a group influence the cohesiveness and accomplishments of the group's goal. The enthusiastic interaction of group members, positive interdependence, and a strong sense of individual responsibility are facilitated by good group dynamics (Johnson & Johnson, 1986). Thus, group dynamics are crucial factors that influence EFL students' motivation (Chang, 2010). In order to facilitate positive group dynamics, English teachers should develop the skills to form groups considering learning contexts and students' personal variables such as grade, gender, major, and learner characteristics as well as to structure and evaluate their activities. This study implies that group dynamics develop more deeply when students have collective inquiry and build intimate relationships enabling open and honest discussions during and after the meetings in person and through mobile technology. In Korean society, students tend to avoid interacting with students that differ in age, major, and academic achievement level. As seen in this study, students' desire to learn increases when they are emotionally comfortable. Thus, English teachers should consider students' emotional connections as well as their shared academic inquiry and interest in topics when grouping them. Moreover, they should carefully monitor students' learning, encourage them to develop their own learning strategies, and assess their outcomes in consideration of their learning progress and group synergy. This study extends the literature in the related area by reporting Korean EFL university students' heightened awareness of the importance of collaborative learning, but more research is needed to uncover the complicated dynamics of students' collaborative learning experiences.

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