# Strengthening EFL Teacher Collaboration in the "New Normal": Leveraging the Use of Online Resources

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Abstract: The burden of maintaining the continuity of education amid Covid-19 pandemic highlights the necessity to increase English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher collaboration. This article aims to present a review of literature concerning the benefits and challenges of teacher collaboration, forms of teacher collaboration practices, and the roles of educational leaders in fostering teacher collaboration. Then, it explores possible ways in leveraging online resources to support teachers' collaborative activities. Results of the literature review shows that teachers' collaborative efforts effectively support their professional development and improve students' achievement despite several challenges. Some of the challenges are teachers' lack of time management, inability to provide and receive feedback, inability to appoint collaborative leaders, limited leadership support, deficiency in pedagogical knowledge, and limited technological access and skills. Collaborative practices include peer coaching, pedagogical discussions, sharing of teaching materials, peer observation, pair mentoring, and study groups. Existing literature also shows that the support of educational leaders toward teacher collaboration leads to better teachers' professional development and students' achievement. In addition, the review indicates that online platforms serve as powerful media for collaborative activities. Based on the review of literature, several implications are drawn with regards to the roles of schools, teachers, teacher education institutions, the government, and possibilities for future research.

**Keywords:** Teacher collaboration, New Normal, Online Resources

**Abstrak:** Beban menjaga keberlangsungan pendidikan akibat pandemi Covid-19 mengharuskan para guru Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing untuk meningkatkan kegiatan berkolaborasi. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menyajikan kajian pustaka mengenai manfaat dan tantangan kolaborasi guru, bentuk-bentuk aktifitas dalam kolaborasi guru, dan peran pemimpin institusi/ organisasi pendidikan dalam membina kolaborasi guru. Tulisan ini juga mengeksplorasi berbagai cara yang dapat dilakukan dalam rangka memanfaatkan sumber daya online untuk kegiatan kolaboratif. Hasil tinjauan pustaka menunjukkan bahwa kolaborasi guru efektif dalam pengembangan profesionalisme guru dan peningkatan prestasi siswa walaupun terdapat beberapa tantangan dalam implementasinya. Beberapa tantangan yang dihadapi adalah kurangnya kemampuan guru dalam mengatur waktu, ketidakmampuan dalam memberikan dan menerima umpan balik, ketidakmampuan untuk menunjuk pemimpin dalam kelompokkelompok kolaboratif, terbatasnya dukungan pemimpin, kurangnya pengetahuan pedagogis dan akses terhadap teknologi, serta terbatasnya keterampilan menggunakan teknologi. Bentuk aktifitas kolaboratif guru termasuk peer coaching, diskusi mengenai pembelajaran, berbagi bahan pengajaran, peer observation, pair mentoring, dan kelompok belajar. Literatur yang ada menunjukkan bahwa dukungan pemimpin institusi/organisasi pendidikan terhadap kolaborasi guru berdampak pada pengembangan profesional guru dan peningkatan prestasi siswa. Selain itu, pustaka yang ada juga menunjukkan bahwa media online menunjang kegiatan kolaboratif guru. Berdasarkan kajian literatur terhadap kolaborasi guru, disimpulkan beberapa implikasi sehubungan dengan peran sekolah, guru, lembaga pendidikan keguruan, pemerintah, dan kemungkinan arah penelitian ke depan.

Kata-kata Kunci: kolaborasi guru, kenormalan baru, media dalam jaringan

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The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic prompted teachers to urgently respond to the demand of ensuring the continuity of education despite the closure of physical faceto-face meetings in schools. Consequently, as education front liners, teachers are urged to develop innovative ways in transitioning from face-to-face modes to online modes of teaching. Development of new ways in teaching is particularly demanding for teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because they rely strongly on direct interactions in fostering students' English proficiency. With the limitation of physical face-to-face meetings, teachers may find themselves working in isolation. In effort to reduce teachers' feeling of isolation, Honigsfeld & Hordmeyer (2020) emphasized the need to strengthen collaboration among teachers, which is directed not only toward the improvement of students' learning, but also toward the well-being of colleagues.

In essence, achievement of results in education strongly depends on teachers' collaborative efforts (Avalos-Bevan & Bascopé, 2017). In recent decades, collegial endeavors of educators have increasingly developed self-sponsored collaborations (Office of Educational Technology US Department of Education, 2014) and through professional communities, commonly abbreviated as PLCs (e.g., Abdullah & Ghani, 2014; Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2017). In Indonesia, for example, the Ministry of Education and Culture established Kelompok Kerja Guru (KKG/ Teacher Collaborative Group) for teachers at elementary level and Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP/Subject Teacher Organization) for teachers at junior and high school levels. These government-initiated PLCs are aimed at increasing teachers' competence and professionalism, fostering collaboration among teachers, developing innovations in teaching, and empowering its members to improve their teaching quality aimed at increasing students' competence (Direktorat Profesi Pendidik, 2008).

Fostering a collaborative culture among teachers is one of the underlying principles of PLCs (DuFour, 2004). Participation in PLCs or learning organizations provides a powerful impact toward teachers' professional development (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019). Amid the pandemic, facilitation of professional development is perhaps even more crucial (Schildkamp et al., 2020). In

order for collaboration in PLCs to operate successfully, the support of educational leaders (e.g., school principals/institution managers and curriculum leaders) is essential (Abdullah & Ghani, 2014; Dumay et al., 2014).

The objectives of PLCs as mentioned above underscores the importance of teacher collaboration. With regards to the need to elevate collaboration among teachers during and post Covid-19 pandemic, this paper aims to present insights toward strengthening EFL teacher collaboration in the era of "new normal". Firstly, it presents a review of literature concerning the benefits and challenges of teacher collaboration, forms of teacher collaborative practices, and the roles of educational leaders in facilitating teacher collaboration. Then, it explores ways that EFL teachers can leverage the use of online resources with a specific highlight on the use of two examples of online platforms (i.e., Padlet and Edpuzzle) as media for discussions and documenting collaborative ideas.

# **Benefits and Challenges of Teacher Collaboration**

A breadth of research in education have shown that collaboration generates positive outcomes toward teacher professionalism and student achievement. A study conducted by Ronfeldt et al. (2015) on learning growth in mathematics illustrated that teachers progress in a higher level when they are engaged in a higher collaborative quality. Coherently, a six-year data set in the study indicates that students in schools with better teacher collaboration quality obtain better score improvement. Teachers' collaboration reinforces their beliefs toward their own ability to facilitate students' learning and, thus, creates positive conditions for instructional activities (Dumay et al., 2014). Participation in continuous collaborative practices for professional development strengthens teachers' knowledge, selfconfidence, and educational beliefs (Musanti & Pence, 2010).

Collaborative practices also provide a space for teachers to discuss students' achievement. In order to increase students' achievement, teachers need to shift their collaborative discussions further from merely focusing on "What teachers are expected to teach? to How will we know when each student has learned?" DuFour (2004, p.9). A study conducted by Mora-Ruano et al. (2019) indicated that only when teachers explicitly

discuss students' achievement that they generate a positive effect toward students' performance.

In the perspectives of English language teachers who participated in Tasdemir & Yildirim's (2017) study, collaboration in teaching contributed to the teachers' professional development and reduced their workload. In addition, students gained benefits from the combination of various methods and styles applied by the collaborating teachers. EFL teachers' engagement in collaborative practices reduces their feeling of isolation and encourages them to take advantage of opportunities to influence the development of their EFL programs (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

Findings from Bond's (2013) study indicated that collaboration (e.g. in PLCs) results in positive outcomes for pre-service teachers. Through professional conversations in a community of novices, pre-service teachers participate in helpful and educational conversations with each other. They benefit from the opportunity to verbalize and strengthen their understanding of pedagogical concepts. Additionally, participation in professional conversations offer pre-service teachers emotional assistance.

An inquiry project on teacher collaboration by Jao & McDougall's (2015) showed that a combination of collaboration and professional development was successful in increasing teachers' professional growth. Collaboration among teachers involved cocreation and co-sharing of teaching materials. The project encouraged the enhancement of teacher collaboration at the levels of schools and districts.

Teacher collaboration does not only result in the increase of teachers' professional growth and the improvement of students' achievement. It also encourages the emergence of teacher leaders (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). These leaders play an important role in sustaining collaborative endeavors among teachers and, thus, increasing educational quality.

In spite of the aforementioned benefits, implementation of teacher collaboration poses several challenges. For example, Tasdemir & Yildirim (2017) asserted that differences in teachers' personality, imbalanced power relations, colleagues irresponsibility, and the difficulty in following schedules are problems which need to be resolved constantly and directly in collaborative teaching practices. They asserted that tolerance, respect, support,

and willingness to cooperate are important in teacher collaboration.

In the case of pre-service teachers in Bond's (2013) study, some of the challenges faced by teachers were their limited ability in providing and receiving feedback, difficulty in selecting collaboration leaders, and their lack of time management skill. The novices' lack of ability in providing and receiving feedback as well as selecting leaders among their peers occurred due to their tendency to avoid confrontation. To overcome this limitation, Bond (2013) argued for the need to provide explicit models in providing and receiving feedback as well as selecting a collaboration leader. With reference to the lack of time management issue, researchers of the study suggested the utilization of online discussion platforms to provide additional time for collaboration.

High prioritization of meeting time is crucial in PLC collaborations (Lujan & Day, 2010). However, in online collaborations, teachers may experience a limitation of high-speed internet access (Office of Educational Technology US Department of Education, 2014) and/or limited technological knowledge of the internet (Zhang et al., 2017). Therefore, efforts in increasing teachers' access to the internet and improving their technological knowledge is crucial in enhancing online collaborative activities.

#### **Forms of Teacher Collaborative Practices**

Teacher collaborative practices conducted in various forms. Collaboration through PLCs in a National-type Chinese Schools in Malaysia involves peer coaching and discussions of personal instructional practices (Chua et al., 2020). Peer coaching involves academic, technical, emotional, and reflective support (Zhang et al., 2017). In the context of Indonesia, the routine core activities of teacher PLCs includes discussions of teaching and learning issues, development of lesson syllabi and educational programs, and development of teaching materials (Direktorat Profesi Pendidik, 2008). Teacher collaboration practices through discussions syllabi, peer-teaching, construction of lesson plans and testing materials, assessment, and reflections are proven to be effective in increasing teachers' performance (Islahuddin, 2018).

Other forms of collaboration include peer observation, pair mentoring, and study groups. In peer observation activities, teachers engage in observations of the

classrooms of their peer teachers. The process of peer observation may include reviews of course designs, materials for instruction, classroom interactions, and instructors' performance in presentations (Roberson, 2006). Whether self-initiated or mandated, peer observation is considered an important asset in maintaining continuous teacher professional development (Fletcher, 2017). Through peer observation, teachers reflect on their teaching practices. The activities brought significant enhancement in teachers' instructional quality. Korea and Russian Federation experienced the largest increase in teacher instructional quality (i.e., 45% and 57% respectively) due to the implementation of peer observation (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019). Examples of pair mentoring and study groups were found in Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi's (2016) study of Iranian teachers. In pair mentoring activities, one teacher assists another to enhance expertise in teaching. In the study groups, teachers meet regularly to discuss topics related to teaching. The researchers argued that this form of collaboration relieved the teachers from their feeling of isolation and assisted teachers in increasing ownership of their own learning and self-actualization. Teacher collaboration also includes the use of tools (e.g. curriculum framework and textbooks) in effort to coconstruct knowledge, reconceptualize goals of teaching, and eventually tailor the practices of their teaching to students' needs (Martin-Beltran & Peercy, 2014).

## The Roles of Educational Leaders in **Teacher Collaboration**

Educational leaders play an important role in teacher collaboration. Leadership of school principals influences the degree of collaboration among teachers, provides students with favorable conditions for learning, and induces long-term affect toward the growth of students' achievement (Dumay et al., 2014). Therefore, the roles of educational leaders is imperative in supporting and guiding teachers toward advancing their PLCs (Abdullah & Ghani, 2014). Wells & Feun (2013) found that leadership strategies were proven to be a significant factor in educational transformation. In the context of the "new normal", efforts in sustaining and transforming education practices require the support of school leaders to maintain the wellbeing of teachers and to allow teachers to collaborate throughout the school academic year (Partnership for Resilience, 2020).

# Leveraging the Use of Online Resources

Online and blended forms of teaching and learning becomes the new normal culture in education. In adapting to this culture, often without guidance, teachers strive to make use of existing educational facilities. In the case of Indonesia, the government facilitates teachers' leverage of online resources by providing internet quotas to reduce their financial burden (Kemendikbud, 2020). However, teachers need additional managerial, pedagogical, and technological assistance that can guide them to achieve and maintain high quality in education.

Online collaboration among teachers may be purely virtual or a blend of online physical face-to-face interactions. Collaboration through virtual media provides services similar to those of physical face-toface collaboration in improving the quality of teaching practices (Carpenter & Munshower, 2019). McConnell et al. (2013) found that, although physical face-to-face meetings were preferred by teachers, virtual communication facilitated similar interactions.

As previously mentioned, achievement in teaching and learning is partly the result of collaboration among teachers and learners (Avalos-Bevan & Bascopé, 2017). Among the skills that language teachers must possess in order for online learning collaboration to succeed are the abilities to plan and manage collaboration, to design suitable activities, and to choose the proper tools for learning (Ernest et al., 2013). Therefore, teachers' technological knowledge is vital in online teaching practices. In conditions where internet access is limited, teachers may employ blended forms of collaboration. Membership in blended communities can give more benefit than purely virtual ones (Matzat, 2013). Nonetheless, in the era of "new normal", online technological skill is a necessary skill to be acquired.

Online collaboration can be implemented through various ubiquitous platforms, such as: 1) video conferencing applications (e.g., Zoom, YouTube, and Google Meet), 2) text-based interaction platforms (e.g., email applications, Google Classroom, Edmodo, Facebook, and WhatsApp), and 3) audiovisual platforms (e.g., YouTube, and Vimeo). Bedford (2019) showed that the use of online social media for professional learning not only expands professional networks but also increases interpersonal skills (e.g., the abilities to collaborate and to improve selfquality). Karis et al. (2015) revealed that successful collaboration can be attained with the utilization of ubiquitous and easyto-use visual real-time communication and collaborative text messaging tools.

Teachers can also leverage the use of audio-visual platforms (e.g., YouTube) for online collaboration with or without realtime interactions. Organizations, such as The Association of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia (TEFLIN) and The British Council, have been actively leveraging the use of YouTube to broadcast webinars with regards to the teaching of English through their channels. Many other institutions and individuals have also been actively broadcasting ideas for the teaching of English. The comment section on YouTube platform enables teachers to participate in online interactions about the video contents. Teachers can create and co-create channels with useful contents related to English teaching. The emergence of "teacher-YouTubers" is increasingly common in recent years, especially during the pandemic. Gil-Quintana et al. (2020) found that students in their research regard YouTube as a key resource in improving their academic performance.

A vast number of other interaction platforms are also available on the internet. The following discussion in this section focuses on two examples of online platforms in more detail (i.e., Padlet and Edpuzzle). Although less commonly used than the aforementioned online applications, Padlet and Edpuzzle are valuable options for teacher collaboration due to their easy-to-use features that may aid teachers in collaborative activities, such as discussing ideas and sharing educational materials and references in the forms of texts and audio-visual products. These applications can be integrated into other online teaching platforms (e.g., Google Classroom and Edmodo).

Padlet is an online application which is essentially an online bulletin board, as illustrated in Figure 1, where users can share a wide variety of information (Rosenberger, Beltrán-Martín's 2018). (2019)study indicated that Padlet facilitated students' collaborative learning. Based on this study, it can be expected that the platform may also support collaboration among teachers. Ways in using Padlet for collaboration are provided in a number of webpages (e.g., Renard, 2017; Rosenberger, 2018). One of the many creative ways in using Padlet is employing the platform for collaborative brainstorming

of ideas (Renard, 2017). This activity is an integral part in teacher collaboration.

As shown in Figure 1, Padlet offers a variety of attractive bulletin board designs which can be suited to the needs and desires of its users. Each user of this online application is able to start a discussion, post a variety of information, and invite their colleagues to participate in the conversation. One of the advantages of Padlet is that records of collaborative interactions can easily be seen and, thus, retrieved because each topic is posted in an individual discussion box and organized neatly on the bulletin board. Participants in Beltrán-Martín's study utilized Padlet for six different themes: gathering of resources for research, classroom resources, classroom diary, frequently asked questions, brainstorming of ideas, and online dialogues. The study indicates that the use of Padlet is beneficial in documenting collaborative interactions.



Figure 1. A Screenshot of Padlet Bulletin Board Designs (Padlet.com, n.d.)

Padlet can serve as a platform for teachers to share ideas concerning students' achievement, curriculum and syllabus design, teaching materials, meeting schedules, and other issues related to teacher collaboration directed to improve students' performance and enhance teachers' skills as well as their self-confidence in teaching. For EFL teachers, padlet can be used to teach a variety of skills, such as writing, reading, speaking, and listening due to its ability to enable users to import and utilize texts, audio, and video files on the discussion board (Nagamani, 2017). This feature allows collaborating teachers to discuss best classroom practices and also use the platform for lesson simulations. Rosenberger (2018) provides a more detailed explanation on how to utilize Padlet for collaboration. A variety of videos discussing how to use Padlet are also available online.

Edpuzzle is an online interactive video application used for teaching and formative

assessment. This learning platform enables teachers to co-create lessons and co-teach through interactive videos. Teachers can self-create the videos or modify videos from publicly available online sources, such as YouTube, National Geographic, and Khan Academy.

Figure 2 illustrates a page on an Edpuzzle account which presents a variety of publicly available videos for language teaching. Teachers can readily download these videos and edit them according to instructional needs, including adding questions and tasks for the purpose of assessment. The platform provides features for teachers to add co-collaborators and create groups of teachers at the same schools/institutions or PLCs.

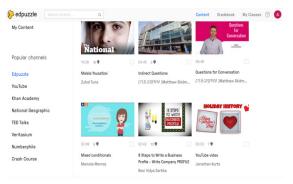


Figure 2. A Screenshot of an Edpuzzle Account Page (Edpuzzle, n.d.).

The use of Edpuzzle has proven to be effective in improving students' listening skills (Aula, 2020). It is possible for teachers to explore the use of this platform to co-share and develop teaching materials and ideas for improving not just students' listening skills, but also other language skills. A more detailed tutorial on using Edpuzzle is available on Edpuzzle support center webpage (*For Teachers – Edpuzzle Help Center*, n.d.). Online video tutorials are also available.

# CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION Conclusion

Physical school closure during Covid-19 pandemic beginning in March 2020 prompted teachers to immediately transition to the use of online platforms to continue the process of teaching and learning. The urgency to develop innovative teaching is more demanding for EFL teachers due to their reliance toward interactive activities to foster students' English proficiency. This condition often puts teachers in a feeling of confusion and isolation. Consequently, teachers need knowledge, technology, and moral support

to maintain their well-being while striving to improve students' achievement. Thus, teacher collaboration and support from educational leaders is even more crucial in the era of "new normal".

A number of research in recent decades show that collaboration among teachers is beneficial in improving teachers' self-confidence, knowledge, and pedagogical skills. Studies also indicate that teacher collaboration contributes to the increase of students' achievements. Despite the benefits that it has to offer, collaboration endeavors pose several challenges, such as teachers' lack of time management skills, inability to provide and receive feedback, limited leadership support, deficiency in pedagogical and content knowledge, and limited technological access and skills.

Teachers collaborate through various activities, such as: 1) peer coaching, 2) discussions of pedagogical development, 3) sharing of teaching materials, 4) peer observation, 5) pair mentoring, and 6) study groups. All of these activities are geared toward teacher professional development and improvement of students' achievement. Teacher collaboration is either self-initiated or mediated by PLCs. In any way that the collaboration is initiated, a greater impact toward the improvement of educational quality occurs when teacher collaboration is supported by educational leaders (e.g., school principal/institutional managers and curriculum leaders). Leadership support is especially important in facing the uncertainty of the pandemic when teachers need to work collaboratively to maintain continuous teaching and learning.

Limited physical face-to-face meeting triggers the necessity to incorporate online resources for learning. Whether teachers employ a purely virtual form or a blended form of teaching, they need to increase proficiency in using online resources. Online collaborations through video conferencing platforms, text messages, and audio-visual online applications serve as tools to empower teachers in the process of teaching and learning. For EFL teachers, in particular, these online platforms provide the necessary features for increasing students' speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills that they need to increase their language proficiency. This paper highlights two useful platforms for collaboration (i.e., Padlet and Edpuzzle). These applications have been proven to facilitate collaborative learning in EFL classes as well as other forms of collaborative Therefore, utilization interactions. these platforms may also facilitate teacher collaborative activities. However, notion needs to be explored further through empirical studies.

### **Implications**

The review of literature presented in this paper provides insights into issues related to teacher collaboration. Based on those insights, several implications can be drawn in relation to the roles of schools (i.e., educational leaders), teachers, teacher education institutions, the government (i.e., education ministry), and possibilities of future research.

In order to enhance EFL teacher collaboration educational leaders need to actively support teacher PLCs. Schools should be organized to maximize conversations among teachers, establish a conducive environment for teacher development, establish study groups which focus on pedagogical reflections, and nourish the growth of study groups and peer observations which encourage teachers to actively coconstruct knowledge (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016).

Teachers need to develop consciousness toward the importance of collaboration and increase voluntary participation in collaborative practices. In collaborating, it is also necessary for teachers to be communicative, respectful, supportive, and cooperative (to name a few) in order to establish a comfortable collaboration atmosphere (Tasdemir & Yildirim, 2017).

Teacher education institutions need to equip in-service teachers and pre-service teachers with essential collaborative skills. The government, through the ministry of education, must support teachers' professional development and furnish them with necessary facilities for collaboration and reduce time-consuming administrative responsibilities.

Issues related to teacher collaboration open possibilities for future research. For research in the field of English language teaching, several issues require further examination: 1) how interactions in EFL teacher collaboration affect their roles, identity negotiation, and construction of knowledge (Musanti & Pence, 2010), 2) how EFL teachers' perceive professional collaboration, 3) how online and blended forms of collaboration in the "new normal"

can increase EFL teachers pedagogical and technological knowledge, 4) how EFL teachers' collaboration through online platforms contributes to the improvement of students' achievement, and 5) challenges in EFL teacher collaboration in the era of "new normal". These issues are just a few among many possible areas of research concerning EFL teacher collaboration. Measures taken to develop collaboration among EFL teachers will hopefully contribute to the enhancement of educational quality in the field of English language teaching.

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