

26 - 28 June 2026

Kuala Lumpur , Malaysia

Enhancing Critical Thinking and Student Engagement through Collaborative and Problem-Based Learning in Saudi EFL Higher Education

Prof. Dr. Wael Holbah

Jazan University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Saudi EFL higher education increasingly emphasizes learner-centered pedagogies that support communication, critical thinking, and active participation in line with Saudi Vision 2030. Among these approaches, Collaborative Learning (CL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) have gained attention for their potential to enhance language learning through interaction, teamwork, and authentic problem-solving. This study investigates the role of CL and PBL in improving critical thinking, communication skills, and student engagement in Saudi EFL classrooms. Adopting a qualitative and analytical research design, data were collected from twelve EFL teachers working in a Saudi public university through a semi-structured questionnaire comprising open-ended questions. The primary data were supplemented by a review of relevant literature and empirical studies on learner-centered EFL pedagogy. The findings indicate that CL and PBL promote learner motivation, confidence, classroom participation, communicative competence, and critical thinking development. However, challenges such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, and learner dependence on traditional teaching methods continue to affect implementation. The study concludes that integrating CL and PBL into EFL curricula, teacher training, and assessment practices can foster more interactive and effective learning environments. The findings provide practical insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers seeking to strengthen learner-centered EFL education in Saudi higher education.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Critical Thinking, EFL Learning; Problem-Based Learning; Student Engagement