THE PERCEPTION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTORS TOWARDS COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate how students and instructors perceive cooperative learning in English classes and to see if there is any difference between the perceptions of male and female students. A questionnaire which was administered to examine the perceptions towards collaborative learning was responded by 82 students. Next, interview sessions were held with the two learners who had the most negative and positive attitudes towards collaborative tasks in class. In addition, three instructors teaching English to different classrooms were interviewed on collaborative learning. Data collection and analysis was based on bottom-up process as the concepts or themes are built systematically. Consequently, survey results showed that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female students. Further, students stated that collaborative work enabled them to negotiate and learn from each other. However, it was found that they felt worried about some off-task students while working in a group. Finally, the study revealed instructors believed collaborative tasks are fun, and it facilitates interaction in English lessons.

Keywords: Collaborative tasks; cooperative learning; group work activities

ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİ VE ÖĞRETİM ÜYELERİNİN İŞBİRLİKÇİ ÖĞRENMEYE YÖNELİK TUTUMLARI

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı üniversite öğrencilerinin ve öğretim üyelerinin İngilizce derslerinde işbirlikçi öğrenmeye karşı tutumlarını ve varsa erkek ve kadın öğrenciler arasındaki algısal farklılığı incelemektir. Öğrencilerin işbirlikçi çalışmaya karşı tutumlarını incelemeyi amaçlayan anket 82 öğrenci tarafından cevaplanmıştır. Sonrasında en olumsuz ve en olumlu tutum sergileyen iki öğrenciyle işbirlikçi öğrenmeyle ilgili görüşme yapılmıştır. Ayrıca, farklı sınıflarda İngilizce öğreten üç öğretmenle de röportaj yapılmıştır. Veri toplama ve analiz evresinde "tabandan-yukarıya" süreci izlenmiştir çünkü tüm kavram ve temalar adım adım

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şekillenmiştir. Sonuç olarak anket sonuçları erkek ve kadın öğrenci grupları arasında anlamlı bir algısal farklılık olmadığını göstermiştir. Ayrıca, öğrenciler işbirlikçi öğrenme uygulamalarının birbirleriyle fikir alışverişi yaparak birbirlerinden öğrendiklerini sağladığını belirtti. Ancak, grup halinde çalışırken etkinliğe karşı ilgisiz olan öğrencilerin onları endişelendirdiği sonucuna varılmıştır. Son olarak da öğretmenler işbirlikçi öğrenmenin İngilizce derslerinde etkileşimi artırdığını ve eğlenceli olduğunu belirtmişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İşbirlikçi çalışma; işbirlikçi öğrenme; grup çalışması etkinlikleri

1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom activities may be categorized in three ways: whole class lessons, group work and individual work (Granström, 1998). Needless to mention, the instructor is responsible for considering the advantages and disadvantages of each and using the one that meets the needs of the learners in any kind of classroom activity. All the learners in a classroom have different needs and learning styles and besides, each instructor has different beliefs and attitudes towards different classroom activities in their lessons. This study will particularly focus on the group work activities, namely, collaborative work or cooperative work as they are frequently used interchangeably (Webb & Palincsar, 1996; Hammar Chiriac & Granström, 2012).

Having our learners engage in traditional group work may be interpreted as collaborative work; however, there is a difference in terms of its purpose. In the traditional group work activities, the learners are basically put in groups, each member focuses on his individual work and the group's shared aim is not taken into account. On the contrary, collaborative work needs good organization and planning along with a well-planned role distribution (Jacob, 1997; Ng & Lee, 1996). This approach underlines the significance of the shift from instructor-centered classrooms to learner-centered classrooms and the necessity of interaction opportunities given to our learners.

There are studies supporting the use of collaborative work in language classrooms with the findings regarding their positive attitude and increased performance (Wichadee, 2007; Gupta, 2004; Slavin, 1996). Particularly, in recent years, due to the shift from an instructor-centered instruction to learner-centered instruction in Turkey, there has been considerable interest in activities that enable learners to speak and interact with each other more often. Gomleksiz (2007) underlines this role of cooperative learning by suggesting that it promotes speaking and interaction among the learners as the instructor holds a facilitator role and leaves the stage to the learners more.

1.1. Cooperative Learning from Students' Perspective

Cooperative learning or peer learning (White, Lloyd, Kennedy & Stewart, 2005) has several definitions. Johnson and Johnson (1989) define cooperative learning as activities done in small groups where students work together by "maximizing their own and each other's learning" (p.786). Here, the term "maximizing" emphasizes students are already given the message that the only way to reach their goals is to work together and to give as much contribution as possible to increase the quality of end product. Another definition is provided by Slavin (1991) who suggests that

"cooperative learning encourages students to discuss, debate, disagree and ultimately to teach one another" (p.71). This definition clearly underlines its function of peer teaching and negotiation among the group members.

An increasing number of studies have found that from the learners' perspective, cooperative learning has quite invaluable results in classrooms. To name a few, in their studies, Farzaneh and Nejadansari (2014) underlined learners' self-confidence and positive attitudes; Johnson and Johnson and Holubec and Roy (1984) emphasized high motivation and Tanveer (2008) examined the enthusiasm in communication within the group. In many studies, we observe the highlighted benefits of student-directed cooperative learning in classrooms. To give an illustration, Hass (2000), in his study examining student-directed learning in labs, revealed that although learners were not comfortable enough while they were evaluating each other's performance at first, over time, they were able to identify their strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, those students who had some gaps in their learning recognized those gaps by themselves and were able to work on those without instructor's direct guidance. Furthermore, he could observe that the students enjoyed the independence and responsibility. These findings indicate cooperative work leads learners to be more autonomous throughout their learning experience.

Similarly, Carpenter and McMillan (2003) emphasize the positive effects of cooperative learning by assigning tasks in "Learning Teams" and conclude that students enjoyed cooperative learning experiences. In addition to this, they appeared quite comfortable with their peers and had productive dialogues throughout the team tasks. Also, when the students' comments were analyzed, the authors have pointed out that new friendships, less stress and the feeling that they are not the only ones struggling in classes are seen as primary benefits of cooperative learning. In line with their study, Essien (2015) concludes that cooperative learning environment enabled students to have more motivation and stronger friendship connections during such activities. He suggested that the students were more interested and on-task during the activities as they were working on more learner-centered tasks, which resulted in increase in their participation and engagement. Last finding he concluded underlined that since learners were constantly exchanging ideas with their peers, cooperative learning tasks facilitated leadership skills and teamwork.

In his book, Harmer (2007) gathers the benefits of group work below:

1. It dramatically increases the number of talking opportunities for each student.
2. As there are many students in the group, personal relationships become less problematic and also there is a greater chance of different opinions and varied contributions than in pair work
3. Group work encourages broad skills of cooperation and negotiation.
4. It promotes learner autonomy by allowing students to make their own decisions in the group without being told what to do by the instructor
5. It promotes learner autonomy by allowing students to make their own decisions in the group without being told what to do by the instructor (p.166).

Even though collaborative learning is considered to enable active learning in classrooms, it is not always engaging for students who prefer to work alone and avoid taking responsibilities in group work activities. As the number of the participants in the group increases, they basically do not share the responsibility equally and they push others to work much harder otherwise they will have a poor product in the end. This approach is known as "social loafing" among social psychologists (Latane, Williams & Harkins, 1979) and it is considered as one of the drawbacks of using group work activities in class.

In their mixed method study, Tucker and Abbasi (2016), listed the factors why students had negative attitudes towards teamwork experiences as follows: "unequal contributions and unfair assessment, individual differences and team formation, task design and teaching" (p.15). In addition to this, it was found that students' previous negative experiences towards group work were the reasons that shaped their attitudes towards cooperative learning negatively (Ulloa & Adams, 2004). They basically believe that cooperative learning did not enhance their learning and motivation and did not increase the time they allocated to study.

1.2. Cooperative Learning from Instructors' Perspective

"Instructors will not become proficient in using cooperative learning procedures by attending a workshop or from reading this book. Instructors become proficient and competent from doing" (Johnson et al., 1984, p.57). The quotation above emphasizes why what we, instructors, do in class and what we learn from the books do not always overlap. It is inevitable that instructors' beliefs will be influenced by the implementations of cooperative learning in class. In this respect, the instructors' beliefs and comments have utmost importance for the literature. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the instructors might have negative attitudes or perceived difficulties in managing cooperative learning activities deriving from their experiences as well as quite positive ones since it is their beliefs and experiences that shape their decisions and behaviors (Bandura, 1986; Ajzen, 1985). This clarifies why we need to investigate the instructors' beliefs and attitudes more eagerly since it is directly linked to classroom practice.

In their research study, Lumpe and Haney and Czerniak (1998) concluded that while some instructors believed that cooperative learning made science interesting or meaningful, some advocated that it took too much time as there were not available appropriate materials for it. In their study, it was also highlighted by some instructors that they were reluctant to use cooperative activities due to "a focus on testing and assessment and lack of time" (p.129). Gillies and Boyle (2010) conducted a study on instructors' reflection on cooperative learning and interviewed with 10 instructors from five different schools. Although all the instructors agreed that they held positive attitudes towards cooperative learning, there were some issues and challenges raised by them. Some of the challenges were that the instructors were concerned about students' 'oversocialization' which results in lack of responsibility in groups, difficulties in time management and longer preparation required prior to the activities.

Some other challenges are identified in the study conducted by Frykedal (2011). She found out that the instructors were discouraged to use cooperative learning activities in their teaching practice since they were worried about keeping the learners as a group for the assignment since this requires certain skills of collaboration. Another reason was the fact that the instructors were not able to be everywhere in the classroom anytime with any group and therefore, they were not convinced enough if the students were working actively in their groups while the instructors were not closer to them.

1.3. Cooperative Learning and Gender

Although male and female students do not differ regarding their cognitive ability and achievement in school, when their learning style is taken into consideration, gender is a factor that is referred and studied a lot (Gallos, 1995). It is also stated that both gender groups do not share similar experiences in learning. When they are compared, males were regarded as individuals who enjoyed more competitive environments while females were considered to be in the more interpersonal part of the competition (Inglehart, Brown & Vida, 1994).

Eagly (1987) points out that women are considered as individuals who aim to ensure the happiness in society whereas men are believed to be more self-confident and controlling than women. These mentioned points are also in line with what Gallos (1995) puts forward by stating that as women are seen as soft, they may experience lack of self-confidence and fear while they are in classrooms. In their study with students who take hospitality and tourism education class, Ro and Choi (2011) revealed that female students had lower rating for cooperative learning than male students. Also, the findings demonstrated that female students had fewer positive attitudes towards team-based work than male students. On the other hand, Fenwick and Neal (2001) stressed that when complex management activities are assigned as tasks, the groups in which the females outnumber or equal males are more effective as those kinds of activities required information management and processing, planning and decision making over protracted periods. However, Springer, Stanne and Donovan (1999) could find no significant difference in the positive effects of small group learning on students' achievement between predominantly female and heterogeneous or mixed gender groups.

Despite the recent increasing attention and growing body of research conducted on collaborative work in classrooms, not a lot of research to the best of our knowledge has been carried out with preparatory school students as well as their instructors, and this particular area has been neglected in the Turkish context. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine both the instructors' and students' perceptions towards collaborative work and to see if students' gender influences their perception towards cooperative activities.

The research questions for this study would be as follows:

1. Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of female and male students on collaborative learning?

2. What are the students' perceptions towards collaborative learning in class?

3. What are the instructors' perceptions towards collaborative learning in class?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Data Collection and Analysis

This study used an inductive approach regarding the data collection and analysis procedures just like most of the qualitative studies do (Merriam, 2009). It does not aim to test a theory or a hypothesis with the data received but aims to collect data to build concepts, themes or categories by "working back and forth between the themes until (it) establishes a comprehensive set of themes" (Creswell, 2007, p.39). Therefore, it allows us to state that there is a "bottom-up" process in data collection and analysis as the concepts or themes are built bit by bit.

This study involves two data collection tools, a questionnaire with student groups and interviews both with student and the instructor groups. Before carrying out any investigation, the administration of the school was informed about the study and the relevant data analysis tools and the required permissions to conduct the study were obtained.

In order to answer the research questions, data collection procedures start with a questionnaire distributed to 82 students (N=82) to see the overall attitudes towards collaborative learning of both gender groups; females and males. Before the instructors distributed the questionnaires to their students, participants were informed about the research topic and told that although they were asked to provide their names on the questionnaire sheet for further analysis, their names would not be mentioned anywhere in the study. This piece of information was also written and highlighted on the questionnaire sheet.

The questionnaire that investigated students' perspectives (Appendix A) was adapted from Kwon's (2014) study, and it consists of 16 statements. 8 of the items (S2, S4, S5, S10, S11, S12, S14 and S15) suggest positive features of collaborative work and other 8 items (S1, S3, S6, S7, S8, S9, S13 and S16) present some negative statements about the research topic. The students were asked to rate the statements on a Likert Scale between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was prepared in students' mother tongue, Turkish, so that they did not struggle linguistic problems while rating the statements.

Next, participants' rating data were analyzed by SPSS to calculate their average scores. When average calculations were completed, the questionnaire were divided into two parts as one consisting of positive statements and the other one shaped by negative statements. Since one of the research questions was seeking to answer if the students' perceptions differ in terms of their gender, the subjects were grouped as "males" and "females" in order to see how positive and negative each group was towards working collaboratively.

As mentioned before, in line with the aim of investigating learners' perceptions much deeper after the questionnaire and understanding why students have such perceptions either, according to

the total scores of the students, two participants, one with the most negative and one with the most positive attitudes towards collaborative work were chosen for the interview.

The aim of the student interview was basically to ask more questions to explore the reasons why they reacted to the questions asked in the questionnaire either negatively or positively. Student interview questions (see Appendix B) were designed around very general themes of the related research topic: how they perceive the collaborative work and what they believe the advantages and disadvantages are. These questions were believed to further investigate their ratings in the questionnaire.

The student interview questions were designed in English and were translated in Turkish before the interview sessions since it would be easier for them to use correct expressions for their feelings and beliefs in their mother tongue. Besides, it aimed to create a more welcoming atmosphere and to give them the feeling that their language was not tested, but their ideas were valued. It was a semi-structured interview because although the interview questions were designed prior to the interview, additional questions were asked when needed. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. Both students were informed about the audio recording and anonymity of their responses. When both interviews ended, all the recordings were transcribed and translated into English by an expert colleague who was specialized in the field of comparative literature and translation studies. Next, all the advantages and disadvantages of collaborative work were listed according to their responses.

After collecting the necessary data from the students, interview sessions were scheduled with the three instructors who were selected according to their availability. Instructor interview sessions (see Appendix C), on the other hand, were designed around the preset themes some of which were mentioned also in the literature review section. Each question in the interview seeks to investigate a theme that is related to the literature. The interview questions were designed according to the following themes: Personalized definition of cooperative learning, grouping students and assigning roles, feelings during the cooperative tasks, benefits and challenges of implementation, gender and shift in attitude in years.

Before the interview, all the three instructors were informed about the audio recording, anonymity and the topic of the study, and necessary permission was received. It was a semi-structured interview and additional questions were asked when necessary. The interviews were held in English. Each interview was around 25 minutes. When the interviews ended, all the responses were transcribed, and the themes were listed around which the questions were formed and coded with the keywords strongly underlined in the interview. With the help of an expert colleague, the codes and keywords were revisited and refined and cross-compared again before the final analysis.

2.2. Sampling

This study employed two instruments: student questionnaire and interviews. First tool, student questionnaire, was distributed to five classes that were teaching academic English in a

university preparatory school. The only preset criterion was that the students were expected to have B1 level of English according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) so that it would be easier for the researchers to limit the variables deriving from language proficiency level of the participants. The design of the student sampling involved both convenience and criterion sampling. It was convenience sampling because it was easier for the researcher to include her classes in the study and to ask her colleagues to distribute the questionnaire in their classes. In addition, it was criterion sampling as all the learners participating in the study met the criterion of having B1 level of English proficiency according to CEFR.

In the interviewing phase of the study, the participants were selected purposefully. As mentioned above, two students that were interviewed were selected according to the results of the questionnaire conducted in the first step. In order to investigate the two extreme perceptions and learn more about each, the student with the most positive attitude and the one with the most negative attitude towards collaborative work were selected and interviewed. Similarly, the instructors who were asked to participate in an interview session were holding either DELTA (Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) or MA degree in language teaching to at least have similar educational backgrounds but with different years of experience. Thus, purposive criterion sampling in selecting both interviewee groups; the instructors and the students.

2.3. Context

The institution in which this study was conducted is located in one of the most populated areas of İstanbul. It is the preparatory school of a foundation university. English language education in preparatory school is mandatory for all majors that require four-year education as all the lessons in their majors are conducted in English. Therefore, language education has a great importance for the institution.

In line with the importance of English education, the institution hires instructors who have at least two years of experience and either MA degree in related fields or DELTA. In the job interview, they are asked questions about strategies that they use to have a classroom where students can communicate as much as possible. This highlights how important interaction among the students is for the institution. Beside the job interviews, the instructors are asked to conduct a demo lesson so that they can show how they design lessons and solve the possible problems they may face during the class hour.

All the instructors are observed every semester and provided feedback about their teaching practice by either administration or CPDU (Continuing Professional Development Unit) members, and their performance is evaluated accordingly. In addition, instructors share their in-class activities and experiences in weekly level meetings and workshops held in certain times during each academic year. Therefore, we may say that it is an institution that gives priority to the improvement of its academic staff.

2.4. Participants

2.4.1. Students

There were eighty-two (82) students (41 male and 41 female) who responded to the questionnaire. They were gathered from 5 different classrooms whose instructors were all different so that it would be possible to eliminate the factor of bias deriving from the instructor. In other words, the students who were with an instructor may hold strong attitudes either positive or negative just because of their instructor. That is why, classes instructed by different instructors were asked to participate in this study.

Although all the students who participated in this study had different educational backgrounds (i.e in private or state school, years of English education etc.), they were all in B1 level classes according to the placement tests of the institution. In this level, they were taught English 20 hours a week with their course books which were all skill-based and focused on four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). All the students in this level were supposed to take the Proficiency Exam that was held in May and continue with their majors in the following academic year.

As the institution's main objective is to create a learning environment as communicative as possible, all the instructors are trained by the Continuous Professional Development Unit (CPDU) to integrate and use pair work or group work activities effectively in their lessons. Therefore, it was an advantage for the researchers of this study that all the students were quite familiar with such activities in their learning process.

There was some information collected about interviewed students' background. Student 1 (S1) and Student 2 (S2) were eighteen years old and are graduate of a state school located in İstanbul. S1 stated that she received English instruction for 8 years while S2 stated that it was 9 years. It is their first year in preparatory school.

2.4.2. Instructors

There were three instructors interviewed in this study. All the three instructors were non-native English instructors. They had 20 hours of teaching per week and they were expected to instruct what was planned by the Curriculum and Testing Unit in the weekly schedule so that all the classes in the same level could be synchronized and prepared for the exams.

In order to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity, the instructors are coded as T1, T2 and T3. All the three instructors can be regarded as experienced as T1 who has the highest number of years in teaching has been teaching for 26 years while T2 has been teaching for 12 years and T3, who has the smallest number of teaching years in the group, has been teaching for 6 years.

In terms of their education and professional background, T1 holds an MA degree in language teaching and has worked in several institutions including a private college, Anatolian high schools, a state university and a foundation university. She has been in this institution for 8 years. T2 has a DELTA certificate and has worked in a private college and a foundation university. It is her ninth

year in this institution. Our last interviewed instructor holds an MA degree in language teaching and has worked in two foundation universities. It is her second year in this institution. All the three instructors I interviewed are aware of the objectives of the institution and are observed either by the administration or CPDU members. Therefore, they are in continuous development regarding their teaching practice.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Students' Perceptions about Cooperative Learning

In the beginning of the study, the students were given the survey that investigated their perceptions towards cooperative learning. Table 1 demonstrates the average results of both female and male students' perceptions towards cooperative learning statement by statement. For the analysis, statements are divided into two sets: First set includes statements 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 15 while second set consists of statements 1, 3, 6,7,8,9, and 13. First set has all the positive statements that support cooperative learning while the second one has the statements that oppose it.

Table 1. The Average Results of The Survey That Investigates Students' Perceptions

	My friends help me learn English.	It is easier for me to learn English by exchanging ideas with my friends.	I prefer doing presentations with my friends in English classes.	I like to participate in group work in English classes.	I am more successful when I do a task with my groupmates.	Duties in group work are distributed in a way that everybody works equally.	I find group work activities effective in the improvement of my English	In English classes, my groupmates help me enjoy the activity	
Females	S2	S4	S5	S10	S11	S12	S14	S15	Total
N: 41	3.292	3.682	3.048	3.829	3.658	3.536	3.585	3.609	28.24
Males	S2	S4	S5	S10	S11	S12	S14	S15	Total
N: 41	3.512	3.658	3	4.048	3.658	3.682	3.682	3.609	28.85

Table 1 (Cont.). The Average Results of The Survey That Investigates Students' Perceptions

	I like to study English alone.	I believe I will be more successful in English classes when I study alone.	I prefer doing presentations alone in English classes.	In group work activities done in English classes, one some people are active, and they complete the task.	I think group work activities are waste of time.	Generally, I am excluded from the group work tasks due to my English proficiency level.	I learn English easier by listening to my instructor instead of doing group work activities.	During the group work activities done in English classes, people talk about different topics.	
Females	S1	S3	S6	S7	S8	S9	S13	S16	Total
N: 41	3.560	2.926	2.512	2.512	1.878	1.804	3.414	2.512	21.12
Males	S1	S3	S6	S7	S8	S9	S13	S16	Total
N: 41	3.073	3.049	2.317	2.829	2.171	1.780	3.415	2.805	21.43

In the first set, the higher the results are, the more positive the students are towards collaborative work. However, in the second set, the higher the results are the more negative the students' perceptions are towards it. Therefore, as it can be seen above, when the students' perceptions are analyzed by the survey, it is seen that total values of both groups are almost the same as they are very close. In other words, according to the survey results, there is no significant difference between the perceptions of female and male students towards collaborative work.

3.2. Students' Perceptions Towards Cooperative Work

The detailed and individualistic survey results helped the researchers of this study identify the students who held the most negative (S1) and positive (S2) attitudes towards collaborative work so that it would be possible to interview with those two students. The interview was designed around three themes: their approach to cooperative learning, their perceived advantages and disadvantages.

When the first question about her approach was addressed to her, S1 started the interview by saying that "I like traditional lessons more" and moved on that she liked writing and memorization more instead of exchanging ideas with her peers. She elaborated her reasons and commented that stronger students had higher prestige, thus, there is no exchange of ideas. Because the focus is on the task and the stronger friend does the task quicker, everybody is happy with that, but the weaker student is demotivated at that point: "The stronger has a kind of prestige or higher status next to the weaker one. It is not like an exchange. It turns into like 'I don't know this, so you do it'. We don't discuss what the correct answer is because the goal at that moment is to finish the task and nobody questions the correct answers".

Contrary to S1, S2 strongly believes that cooperative activities are very positive and beneficial for the members of the groups: "Everybody can find something to learn from somebody else" (S2). Therefore, he considers such activities as tools to learn something from the peers. He moves on by suggesting that: "There is negotiation". The reason why he supported negation was because if there was any problem in understanding a point, you can ask questions to the other members. Obviously, he enjoys this feeling of independence and autonomy to solve his own problems.

For the next question, S1 highlighted only one thing as an advantage: "I think, I like it when one side listens to the other or when the aim is only to speak instead of accomplishing a task on paper". She added that "when it comes to doing something together, the magic disappears". Obviously, she only enjoys the group work activities when there is sharing and speaking, in other words, exchange of ideas but not when a product expected at the end of the task. S2 agreed with S1 in terms of personal relationships but added more. He moved on and said that such tasks also enable learners to motivate each other when there is a struggle. "Instead of researching something for a long time, I can easily ask it to my friend or vice versa. I also think that it keeps our success and motivation high. For example, if someone is demotivated or bored, the other(s) can support him/her". He finalized the advantages with the point supporting the improvement of relationships with friends. He thinks it is advantageous to share things with friends and know each other better: "And finally, it improves our relationships with our friends. For example, when the task finishes, we share other things with our friends, and we get to know each other more". He also believes that it saves time and keeps the motivation of members high to reach the objectives.

As expected, the disadvantages outnumbered the advantages in the interview of S1. The listed disadvantages are: one's controlling the activity and thus, no time allocated to others to participate: "I don't like the idea of one's controlling the activity and telling the correct answers all the time instead of allocating time to his/her friends", difficulty of concentration on task: "let's say we are four people and one of us is quite a talkative and funny. At that moment, it becomes very difficult to concentrate on the task", group work's turning into chat group: "And trust me, in every group activity, there is such a person. It is not like a lesson anymore; it turns into a chat" and the fact that it does not feel like she is having a class: ". It's like I don't feel like having a lesson at that moment. Maybe it is because of my strict point of view. I think I'm used to that kind of traditional teaching and I cannot feel good during cooperative activities".

S2 agreed some points that S1 mentioned. The only drawback he pointed out was the presence of off-task students in the groups. He believes that they hinder his learning, which is a disadvantage for him: "It ruins the concentration of the whole group. So, it depends on the people you're working together. Or when some students do not do anything and everything is on your shoulders, I think this is very disturbing". He basically supports the idea of distributing the task equally among the group members.

3.3. Instructors' Perceptions Towards Cooperative Work

As the interview questions were designed around preset questions, the themes were already identified. The following themes recurred throughout the dataset: personalized definition of cooperative learning, grouping students and assigning roles, feelings during the cooperative tasks, benefits and challenges of implementation, gender and shift in attitude in years.

The interviews of the three instructors began with the questions that investigated their own definitions of collaborative learning. The aim of this question was to see if there would be a keyword or emphasis in the definition. Definitions such as the following are typical of the responses the instructors gave: "There should be *interaction* and *exchange of ideas* in pairs or groups. A kind of negotiation or discussion going on in learning process of students" (T1); "… I think, I define it as *interaction* and working together" (T2); "So, I would define it as collaboration and *interaction* between students in the classroom. They interact with each other in a very nice atmosphere" (T3). When the definitions are taken into account, it is obvious that they all focus on the interactional function on students as their priority during the implementation.

Next, respondents were asked to suggest the ways they grouped students during collaborative activities. All the instructors agreed that they grouped the students randomly. However, sometimes they said they grouped stronger students with weaker ones. The reason why they choose the latter strategy is the difficulty of the task and the skill they are working on. T2 exemplified this by saying "Usually in writing, yeah, I try to put strong and weaker ones together more. It also depends on the topic and task. If the task is challenging, I try to use the same strategy" while T1 commented that "Not very often but I do if their percentage of contribution is an important factor for that activity. Sometimes some weak students don't do anything and just wait for the activity to finish. But if this is an important factor for me, then I may group them like that".

Talking about the issue of assigning roles in task groups, all interviewees said that they let students choose the roles within the group. They basically expect students choose duties voluntarily. The reason that T2 mentions is to increase learners' autonomy. They should know how to distribute the responsibilities. The only instance the two instructors, T2 and T3, assign students is when students cannot decide themselves or the tasks are not distributed fairly, and the instructors feel the need to control it. In order to supper this view, T2 expresses her concerns on the topic by saying "Usually, I ask them to be volunteers for each role. I think it is good for increasing their autonomy in class. It is my first choice. But sometimes you have to control it because most of the time, the strong ones take the roles, which we don't like it".

When the instructors were asked to express their feeling while enabling cooperative learning in class, the overall response to this question was very positive. They said it is fun, they felt comfortable and good while students are engaged in collaborative activities. T2 commented on the issue by saying: ". So, I feel *good* to do cooperative tasks in class. I really feel *comfortable* while the students are engaged on a task collaboratively because they are doing all the work and I'm just

watching them and help them when necessary". The two instructors except for T2, added that it also depended on the class size and level of the students. If the classroom is too crowded, it may be difficult to see what each group is doing and observe them. And, with the lower level students, it takes time but, in the end, we can witness the benefits of it. T3 commented that "In weaker classes, it takes more time but in the end if they work hard and effectively, the result is generally productive and fruitful" likewise, T1 expressed her concerns by stating "If the class size is OK and I feel that I can monitor all the groups and that makes me feel good. Otherwise, they can feel lost and helpless when they need something and cannot reach me".

Next question in the interview asked instructors to list the benefits and challenges of collaborative work and Table 2 summarizes them as follows.

Table 2. Benefits and Challenges of Collaborative Work

	T1	T2	T3
Benefits	- Gives students flexibility - Increase their autonomy - Gives Independence - Increases Motivation - It is enjoyable - Students have the opportunity performing in front of their peers	- Makes students active - Helps weaker students be involved and engaged - They are not afraid of speaking - It is fun - Helps students be autonomous	- Students feel confident - They are active - They learn more in class - They focus on the tasks more
Challenges	- Some students don't take the task seriously - Instructor is afraid of missing some students, - It is time consuming	- The instructor may not give enough feedback - The instructor may miss some of the students during the task	- Some students are resistant to participating group work - It is time consuming especially with weaker students

Table 2 illustrates that there are many common words mentioned by the instructors. In terms of the benefits, they underlined the terms "autonomy", "confidence", "active" and "independence" by stating "For me, it gives them a kind of independence and they see and compare what they have learned when they work together with their friends" (T1) and "(But) when you leave the job on them, then they say 'Now this is my job and I have to do this, otherwise the lesson won't finish so I have

to do something' and they do" (T3). T2 also supported them by suggesting that "the students are not afraid of speaking with their peers" which is about their self-confidence.

Moreover, the two instructors believe that it is quite fun and enjoyable for the learners to do group work activities and one of them added that it increased the level of motivation among the learners. Furthermore, T1 provided us with a benefit that they do not have when there is instructor-student interaction pattern. She stressed the importance of the opportunity to perform in front of their peers and said that "if you have enough time, after the activity finishes, if some of the groups or pairs can perform what they have done, it is more enjoyable because they want to show their product and see the others' ". Obviously, this is about giving our learners some meaningful tasks with aims and objectives so that we can expect them to be hard-working and creative during the tasks. Besides, T2 sees cooperative learning as a chance to involve weaker students more and increase the joy in lesson. She clearly commented ". So, it is nice to engage quiet ones in the task. When they are active, they feel like it is not a lesson but is a part of their life. So, they feel the time is running so fast, they are not bored". She believes that such activities enable our class to be more homogeneous in the level of participation.

Table 2 demonstrates the perceived difficulties by the interviewees. It is apparent that their main concerns are that cooperative learning takes a lot of time in classes and that they are afraid of not being able to observe the groups and provide necessary feedback during or after the task. In other words, the possibility of missing any kind of help request worries them a lot. T2 verbalizes her concerns as follows "I feel I'm not giving enough feedback. For example, when I leave them with the task to watch other pairs or groups one by one, I cannot listen to and supervise all of them at the same time. So, I may miss some of the students and feedback especially in speaking" and "I need to make sure that everybody understands. For example, when I am busy with a group and some other groups didn't understand the task clearly and waiting for clarification, I may miss them" (T1). The last challenges mentioned by the two interviewees are about students' resistance of participating to group work tasks and their off-task and irresponsible behaviors during them.

The next question of the interview was concerned with the relationship between the students' gender and cooperative learning. The interview results demonstrated that all the instructors agreed that there was not relationship between the two. In other words, students' enthusiasm and interest did not depend on their gender but on the personality of the students. Thus, they could not make a generalization. In fact, T2 generalizes what all the three interviewees said by putting forward "I don't think that it depends on the gender, but it depends on the personality of the students. Some of them are very willing to take part in the cooperative activities some of them want to sit down and do nothing. It depends on their personality and how the students approach the language learning environment".

The final question in the interview asked the instructors about the comparison of their first and recent years regarding the use of cooperative activities. While T1 said that there was no change

in her beliefs about using such activities as she told she always used them in classrooms, the other two instructors, T2 and T3 said that there has been a great difference between the two periods of time because "The way I saw teaching was different. It was more instructor-centered. I talked more in the class and the interaction patter was mostly instructor-students" (T2) and "In my first two years, I remember that I didn't use to trust students as much as I do now. I didn't use to believe that they could really succeed when they do something cooperatively. So, I used to have everything on my shoulders. But then I tried and made some mistakes, of course, in some classes. But then when I saw that you're getting better results and getting their attention more, I said, great!" (T3).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Slavin (1991) stated as follows: "Cooperative learning methods are among the most extensive evaluated alternatives to traditional instruction in use in schools today" (p.75). The shift from traditional to more communicative classes is obvious and cooperative activities are among the techniques that enforce a classroom full of student-student interaction.

The first research question aimed to investigate the perceptional difference between the two student groups divided and designed in terms of their gender. They rated the Likert scale statements and the survey results of this study revealed that there is no big difference between the perceptions of male and female student groups as the results have been very close and similar. This finding gets the support of Springer, Stanne and Donovan (1999) who found no difference between the two groups as well.

The purpose of the second research question was to understand how the students perceive cooperative work in class. Two extreme attitudes were taken into account in this study and there were some main points that the students highlighted in the interview. Some positive aspects of collaborative work were the opportunity to negotiate and to learn from each other, which saves time, and to improve interpersonal relationships. Hass (2000) and Ellison and Boykin (1994) found similar findings about the support that students give each other and the positive on-task attitude during such activities. Actually, both students agreed on the disadvantages of collaborative work as they were both worried about the group's performance with some off-task students. As mentioned in the literature, "social loafing" is a perceived drawback from the students' perspective. Also, the negative attitudes towards collaborative work of the study conducted by Tucker and Abbasi (2016) are in line with what both students mentioned in their interviews.

Last research question aimed to understand collaborative work from the instructors' perspectives. The results demonstrated that all the instructor interviewees told that they believed collaborative work enabled "interaction" and had fun with group work activities. Most of the time, they group the learners randomly but there were cases in which they took strong and weak learners into consideration. If the learners could not organize the member roles, they would group strong and weak students together. At this point, what the students told us about their group members during the

task puts more emphasis on the instructors' grouping strategy. As instructors, we may have different aims to involve strong learners in groups on purpose; however, this may be interpreted by the learners differently. When we group our students, it would be much better if we make sure that the roles are distributed equally so that there is no feeling of injustice among the group members.

The advantages and disadvantages mentioned by the instructors are mostly supported by the studies such as the ones conducted by Gillies and Boyle (2010), Lumpe, Haney and Czerniak (1998) and Frykedal (2010). What was very surprising was that the instructors had the fear of missing the students who were working in groups and not being able to provide necessary feedback.

Finally, none of the instructors indicated that one gender group is more interested in the collaborative activities more and superior to the other. They told that they see no difference in terms of their learners' gender while they are assigning the group tasks. In short, they could not make such a generalization. In addition, as the instructors gained more experiences in their teaching practice, the two instructors told that their perceptions and attitudes towards cooperative activities changed. In the beginning of their career, they were more reluctant to use such activities or did not let students do most of the task by themselves. We may conclude that there may be a relationship between instructors' experience and their attitudes regarding cooperative activities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student questionnaire

This survey is designed to collect your ideas about group work activities done in English classes. Please rate the statements below honestly. Your personal information **will not** be shared by any third parties and your answers will be anonymous. Thank you for your support.

Name: **Gender: Female / Male**

Please rate the statements below with the correct number

1= strongly disagree

2= disagree

3= undecided

4= agree

5=strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I like studying English by myself.					
2. My friends help me a lot to learn English.					
3. I believe I will be more successful when I study English by myself.					
4. It is easier to learn English by brainstorming with my group friends.					
5. I prefer doing presentations in English classes with my friends.					
6. I prefer doing presentations in English classes by myself.					
7. In group works done in English classes, only some are active, and they complete the task.					
8. I think group work activities are waste of time.					
9. Usually, I am excluded from the group because of my English proficiency.					
10. I enjoy taking parts in group work activities in English classes.					

11. I am more successful when I complete an activity in English classes with my friends.					
12. The roles in group activities are distributed fairly so that everybody is active in the group.					
13. I learn English easier when I listen to my instructor instead of working in a group.					
14. I find group work activities effective in my English learning.					
15. In English classes, my group friends help me complete the activity in an enjoyable manner.					
16. In group work activities, group members talk about some irrelevant things.					

Appendix B

Post-Questionnaire Interview for Students Perceptions towards Cooperative Work

1. What are your perceptions towards cooperative work?

2. What are the advantages of cooperative work?

3. What are the disadvantages of cooperative work?

Appendix C

Interview Questions of Instructors' Perspectives towards Collaborative Work in Classrooms

Background and Demographics

1. What is your highest degree of completion?

2. What is your teaching certification? What do you currently teach?

3. What additional training certification do you hold?

4. Do you attend workshops and/or conferences on a regular basis?

5. How many years have you been teaching English?

Experiences of Using Collaborative Activities in Classrooms

1. How would you define cooperative learning?

2. What does cooperative learning look like in your classroom?

    a. How/when is it used? (Especially with which skills)?

    b. How are students grouped?

    c. How do you assign students roles?

3. How do you model cooperative learning with your students?

4. How do you feel about cooperative learning?

5. What do you feel your role is as instructor during cooperative learning experiences? Why?

6. What benefits and/or challenges do you think occur with cooperative learning?

7. Do you think there is a difference between students' perceptions towards cooperative activities in terms of gender? Do you think one specific gender group is more/less interested in collaborative activities? Why?